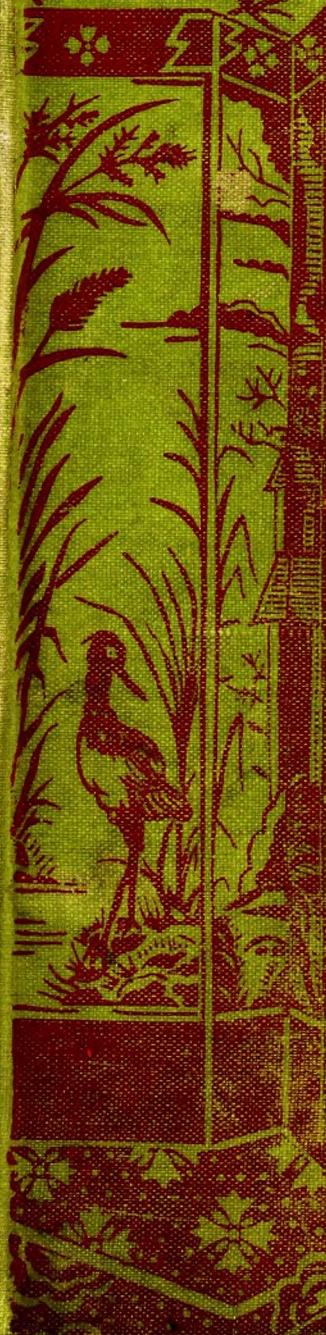


COLONEL
ANNELEY'S
DAUGHTERS



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A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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COLONEL ANNESLEY'S DAUGHTERS.



CHAPTER I.

“**H**OW very late you are, Bee, I was beginning to get quite anxious about you, but I consoled myself with the reflection that as Allan Barrington was with you, there was no chance of your coming to grief,” observed Constance, as her sister entered the room.

“Have you been sketching all this time?”

Beatrice, having placed her drawing-

book on the table, turned towards her sister, who was startled at the pale, weary face, with a look of intense sadness written on every feature.

“What is the matter?” she cried, springing from the sofa and going up to Beatrice. “What is it?” she gasped, in a frightened voice; “something has happened, tell me what it is.”

“Do not be alarmed, Conty,” replied her sister, pushing her gently towards the sofa; and then kneeling by her side she buried her face like a child on her sister’s knees, and sobbed as if her heart would break. “I am only very, very unhappy; I shall be better soon,” and she wept as her sister had never seen her do before.

“Darling Bee! it has something to do

with Allan Barrington, I feel sure ; please tell me all about it."

"I will tell you everything directly, Conty, but you must not repeat it," and then, in broken accents, her slight figure shaken by her emotion, Beatrice told her story ; she kept nothing back.

"Is that all ?" said Constance at last, with a sigh of relief ; "I feared it was something much worse."

"Oh ! Conty, is it not enough ? I love him so dearly, but I can never marry him, unless Miss Hughes gives him up, which I feel sure she will never do, nor does Allan expect she will."

"Well, then, he will have to give her up, which will come to the same thing as far as we are concerned."

“The same thing! Do you think, Conty, that I will marry a man who is engaged to another girl? It would be dishonourable, and I love him far too well to let him do wrong for my sake.”

“I do not see it at all in that light, Bee; if he has ceased to love her, I cannot see that he is bound to marry her, and she must be a perfect horror of a girl if she insists on it.”

“I could not do it, all the same, Conty; I feel it would be wrong.”

“I blame him very much,” continued Constance, “in not having absolutely refused to be bound by that old promise when she came out to India, it was very weak and foolish of him.”

“But it was sheer pity which prevented

his doing so, though, perhaps, he was weak."

"There is no doubt he ought to have broken it off before speaking to you; in that, I think, he has behaved badly."

"He could not help loving me, he says, and I do not think he imagined I should consider him bound to marry Miss Hughes. Anyhow, Conty, if he was wrong I cannot be angry with him, he is so unhappy; so please never say anything against him to me, for it hurts me so much."

"He deserves to be unhappy, for being so utterly idiotic," said Constance; "but, Bee, it will all come right."

"Not unless Miss Hughes consents to breaking off the engagement. It would not be just or right to take him away

from her. She may love him just as much as I do."

"I do not believe a word of it, and I doubt your being silly enough to think so either. Depend upon it, she found it suited her purpose to marry him, so she had the impudence to ask him to do so. You may be sure she is a wretch, and if you are as fond of him as you say, Bee, you ought to be glad to get him out of the clutches of such a girl."

"But we do not know that she does not really love him, Conty ; her remaining faithful to him all these years looks like it."

"You little simpleton ! why, she probably never got a chance of catching another man, and so she rushed off to India after poor Allan."

“ I have told him if Miss Hughes releases him I will marry him. I cannot, and will not, say more. I should never be happy if I were the cause of his behaving dishonourably to another girl.”

“ But have you considered to what a life you condemn him ? ” asked Constance. “ What chance of happiness is there when all the love is on one side ? Granting even that she does care for him, which nothing will ever persuade me that she does, I am certain Miss Hughes is an underbred, designing woman.”

“ We have no right to say so, Conty, till we know more of her. I do wish to be just to her, and feel sorry for her, as Allan hates her so much ; but I cannot do so just yet, by-and-by perhaps I shall.”

“ I verily believe, Bee, that you consider everybody before yourself. It is a virtue no doubt, up to a certain point ; but carried to excess, I declare it becomes a positive vice,” cried Constance impatiently.

A knock at the door interrupted the conversation, and the courier, Durand, announced that in five minutes the dinner would be ready.

Should he carry a shawl and a cushion down for miladi ?

“ No,” replied Constance ; “ make our excuses to Sir John, and say Miss Annesley is not very well this evening, and order dinner up here for us in half-an-hour. Tell Sir John we shall hope to see him to-morrow morning.”

Beatrice expressed her gratitude at Con-

stance's thought for her. It was late that night before she could make up her mind to close her window and go to bed. The air was cold and damp, but, wrapped in a shawl, she felt it cooled her aching temples. She had shut the door into her sister's room for fear of disturbing her. Conty was not sleeping, though, for her heart was full of her sister's troubles. Never had she shed more unselfish tears than on that night ; her heart was so touched by the way Beatrice bore her sorrow, and she prayed earnestly to become more like her young sister.

At last Beatrice sought her bed, but sleep would not come ; over and over again she repeated to herself all that had passed between herself and Allan.

"Oh! it is so hard, I cannot bear it!" she cried; "but it is as hard for him."

Life had seemed so happy and bright that morning, and now everything was so changed. She tried to pray; she had several times already made an effort to do so, but the words died on her lips, and then a dread seized hold of the poor girl,—was her trouble making her cold and wicked? Weary and worn out, she finally fell asleep.

The sun was shining brilliantly into her room the following morning, but still she did not awake. Constance had desired her maid not to disturb her.

"There is a letter and a parcel for Miss Annesley, my lady," observed the maid, later on. "Durand tells me that Captain Bar-

rington gave it him this morning, just as he was going off to the station."

"To the station!" cried Constance, in a tone of surprise. "Oh, of course; however, I was not aware he was going so early."

There was no occasion to let Stevens suspect that anything special had occurred, she reflected.

When she entered her sister's room half-an-hour later, she found Beatrice awake.

"Here is a letter for you, Bee, dear, and a parcel; they were left by Allan Barrington. He is gone away, I hear from Stevens."

"Gone!" replied Beatrice aghast.

"It is better so, dear; read his letter, and I will come back to you when I have finished dressing."

Beatrice opened her letter, and her eyes filled with tears. Captain Barrington had written it the night before.

“MY DARLING,—for no matter what happens, you will always be that, I am writing to say good-bye. Would that I could have said it, but I obey my uncle's wishes in leaving to-morrow morning. This evening I told him all, and he was very much annoyed, but for this I was quite prepared. He seemed much hurt at what he called my want of confidence in him. I explained my silence by my fear of vexing him, and also that I had always had a secret hope that something might occur to enable me to break it off. He accused me of having behaved in a heartless way to you, and

then I confess I lost my temper. However, he softened down, and we parted good friends. He insists on my returning at once to England, and that I should not attempt to see you till I hear from Bessie Hughes. If she refuses my request, I implore you not to shut your heart against me. The worst she can do is to bring an action against me for breach of promise, and I should doubt if even *she* is capable of that. God bless you, my own dear love ; think of me, and be true to your devoted, ALLAN.

“ *P.S.*—I bought the amber beads for you, wear them for my sake. I cannot return you the little pencil-case, I shall keep it and wear it on my watch-chain.”

Beatrice read the letter over, two or

three times, and sighed ; it was evident to her that Allan had not realised how completely they were parted. She dreaded the conversation which she knew was inevitable with Sir John, for if he were to take the same view as Conty had done as to the propriety of Allan's throwing over Miss Hughes, in the event of her refusing to release him, it would only add to her difficulties, and she dreaded lest anything should shake her resolution of doing what she felt so strongly was right.

When Constance returned, Beatrice communicated the contents of the letter to her, and asked whether it would be wrong for her to keep the amber beads, or ought she to return them.

“ Why should you not keep them, dear ? ”

replied Constance ; “ there is no harm in his giving you a present if he likes. There is no reason why you should be ashamed of your love for Allan. I shall leave you alone, darling, this morning, and take Stevens out with me, as I want to do some shopping. It will be much better for you to see Sir John when you are alone.”

After Constance had gone out, Beatrice took up a book and tried to read, but found it impossible to fix her attention. About eleven o'clock Sir John made his appearance.

“ I am glad to find you alone, my dear little girl, for I want to have a little talk to you,” he observed, as he entered the room. “ I am not going to scold you, child,

so do not look so frightened ; ” and taking her hand, which felt cold, in his grasp, he bent forward and kissed her forehead. “ Very far from scolding you, I want to tell you what a true, honest, little woman I think you. Allan told me all his story last night, and I own that I felt hurt at his want of confidence in me, who have stood in the place of a father to him from his birth, and I am disappointed at his having acted in a way towards you which I consider to be dishonourable.”

“ Oh ! Sir John, do not mind about me ; he is the one to be pitied, for he only promised to marry Miss Hughes because he felt sorry for her.”

“ He behaved like a fool,” answered Sir John ; “ it is hard to believe that he could

have been in his right senses when he let himself be bamboozled by a designing woman like this Miss Hughes. Get out of it! why, of course he must; but I shall be very much surprised if she will be willing to let him slip through her fingers. I asked him last night how he would feel when he found himself the defendant in an action for breach of promise of marriage."

"But he ought to marry her if she will not release him," said Beatrice quietly; "he will not be happy, I am afraid, but he will have done his duty."

"That is your advice, is it?—find out what is your duty, and then do it, cost what it may;—well, you are a plucky girl, and would be, I believe, capable of acting on

that principle yourself. But there is another consideration : if Allan begins his married life by hating the woman he has made his wife, and by living, as he inevitably would do, apart from her, I do not think the lady would find him such a very desirable husband. Anyhow, he must write to her and explain the position clearly, and after that, we must see what is best to be done."

" It seems hard upon her, but you agree with me, Sir John. I could not have promised to marry Allan under the circumstances." Her voice trembled, and she found it hard to keep her tears from falling.

" My poor child, if anything could make me love you better, it would be the unselfishness of your love. I can find it in my

heart to forgive Allan, when I think how strong the temptation must have been to him. However, I cannot make up my mind at present to relinquish the hope of seeing the wish I have been fostering all these weeks in my old heart fulfilled, and that is of having you for my niece, almost my daughter, I might say."

"I can never thank you enough, Sir John, for all your goodness to me," replied Beatrice gratefully.

The door opened and Constance appeared, to her sister's great relief.

"Good morning, Lady Denzil; I have been talking over our trouble with your sister, and telling her what a brave little woman I think she is. We must hope that the cloud which hangs over us just now

will soon be removed, and that we shall have a blaze of sunshine in its place."

Beatrice stole gently from the room, for she felt it almost impossible to maintain her self-control any longer.





CHAPTER II.

AFEW days after their arrival at Thun, Beatrice was sitting in the garden with Sir John. He was telling her what expeditions they might make in the neighbourhood.

“Here are the letters,” he cried, as the courier was seen approaching. “I am longing for a sight of the newspapers. Ah! here is a letter from Allan, among others.”

Beatrice occupied herself with the perusal of a long letter from Madame Arlini, but she could not resist a glance at Sir John, hoping

he would tell her something of the contents of the letter he was reading. She noticed at once that he was looking both serious and somewhat anxious, and she could not help saying,—“I hope there is no bad news in his letter, Sir John.”

Sir John continued to read the letter to the end, and then removed his spectacles, and replaced them in their case, with a deliberation that was almost exasperating, Beatrice thought.

“I cannot say there is good news,” he replied. “Whether it will be altogether bad, remains to be proved.”

“There is nothing wrong with Allan?” she asked, quickly.

“No, child, he is all right enough, but he tells me something which will distress you.

Hubert has met with an accident, and has broken his arm."

"Poor Hubert, I am sorry. But we shall, of course, go home to him at once, which is one comfort."

"You need not alarm yourself; a broken arm is a simple affair, and there is no danger to be apprehended, but I will read you what Allan says."

"On arriving in London, I found a telegram at my club from Hubert, to whom I had written to say I was returning to London; he told me he had broken his arm, and begged me to come down to him at Denzil-mere at once. I arrived last night, and found him going on as well as possible. He had returned home only the day before the accident occurred. It was in trying to save

a child from being run over by a cart, the horses of which had got frightened, and had bolted ; he saved the child, but was caught by the shaft of the cart, knocked down, and got his arm broken just below the elbow. He makes light of the affair, but he is very depressed, and seems as if he had given up all hope of things coming right between him and his wife. He does not expect her to return when she hears of his accident, and begged me not on any account to suggest her doing so."

" How sorry I am for him," said Beatrice ; " but, of course, Conty will not hesitate now ; though he is to be pitied for his suffering, he will not regret it if it brings her back to him."

" Pray do not go and urge your sister to

go home," replied Sir John, as Beatrice prepared to return to the hotel; "leave it to her. As I have said before, she should go back to her husband, as he wishes, of her own free will."

"Why, it would be scarcely human to leave him alone under the circumstances."

Beatrice found Constance sitting near the window, gazing at the blue lake below, a sad, dissatisfied expression on the lovely mouth, and a look of weariness clouding the whole face.

"Is it time for luncheon?" she asked, without looking up.

"Conty, I have something to tell you, which you will be sorry to hear, though you need not be alarmed. Sir John has just

had a letter from Allan telling him that Hubert has broken his arm." And then Beatrice told her sister briefly the circumstances, as related in the letter.

" Why has he not written to me, or made anybody else do so ? " asked Constance.

" Well, two reasons may have prevented his doing so, Conty ; perhaps he may not have thought that you would care very much," said Beatrice, steeling her heart against the pain she was resolved to inflict on her sister ; " and, secondly, he might have thought it seemed like suggesting that you should go home to nurse him."

" It is horrid of him to think I should not care ; and of you to say so," answered Constance angrily.

" Do not be angry, Conty ; I only said he

might think so, I have no right to say he did think so."

"In fact, he thinks me heartless ; he will soon end in making me quite so."

"Do not be unjust," replied Beatrice. "When he left you, he promised not to urge you to be with him, unless you yourself wished it. He promised that no pressure should be put upon you. What ground has he for thinking your feelings have changed ? Have you ever said one word of wishing to be with him again ? Have you ever told him what you have told me often, that you are really sorry for all the pain you have caused him ?"

"I have told you that I cannot write and tell him all this, till I feel sure he has not changed towards me," replied Constance,

with an obstinate expression settling on her face.

“Really, Conty, though you are my sister, and I love you dearly, I sometimes wonder whether it is in you to love any man truly ; whether you have a grain of tenderness in your heart ; you can still go on repeating all this over and over again, when you know he is suffering and unhappy. I really sometimes feel in despair about you.”

“How do you know what I feel ?” asked Constance passionately ; “you have no right to assume that I am indifferent to his sufferings ; perhaps I care for him much more than you know, and am more unhappy at having behaved to him as I have done than you have any idea of. What better

proof is there that he has changed in his feelings towards me, than his not asking me to come to him?"

"Because it would be going back from his word; cannot you see that?" replied Beatrice, striving hard to be patient; "no sane person can doubt what Hubert wishes, or that he loves you as dearly as ever."

"That may be true, but he ought to have known how hard it would be for the proposal to come from me."

"Put your pride, your dignity, or whatever you like to call it, aside for once in your life, and try and think of the sufferings of others; try to see straight, and not to let yourself be warped by your self-love, for, upon my word, you must forgive me, but it is nothing else."

“ Well ; shall I ? ” and Constance pushed the hair off her forehead impatiently. “ What I mean is, shall I write to Hubert and ask him if he would like me to go to him ? ”

“ Not in those words, I sincerely hope, Conty ; no, write and say you really long to be with him, and that you intend starting off to join him to-morrow ; that you trust he has forgiven you the past, and that you most sincerely regret all the pain you have given him. Do for once open your heart to him ; trust me, you will never repent it.”

“ I will think over it, Bee,” and not another word could her sister extract from her on the subject ; so she returned to Sir John.

After luncheon, Constance desired that her coffee might be taken up to her sitting-room, and she left Sir John and her sister in the garden.

“She is gone to write to Hubert, I am sure,” said Beatrice.

“Anyhow, she is going home, and that is something,” replied Sir John; “but she was uncommonly reticent as to her own feelings.”

“Conty is always rather silent on those subjects; in fact, her being so is a good sign, I think.”

“I do not quite know what to say as to her plan of travelling straight through to London; I doubt whether she is quite strong enough.”

“Oh, Sir John, Conty will do very well! —she can always sleep in a train. We

shall rest one night in London, and go down to Denzilmere the day after. I hope you are coming there with us?"

"That requires consideration; at present I am rather disposed to do so."

"Then, please to keep in the same state of mind; for I feel sure you will be a great help. Your presence will make everything go more smoothly."

"Well, little flatterer, you shall have your own way."

It was a lovely October evening on which Constance Denzil first saw her future home. She had felt the fatigue of the journey more than she had expected, and she lay back in the carriage which was conveying them from the station, without speaking.

Sir John had stayed in London after all, promising to rejoin them the day after. He remained partly with a view of seeing his nephew, who returned to London that very day from Denzilmere.

"Oh, Conty, how lovely the park is ! Do look at those deer, with their heads just showing above the fern !" cried Beatrice, who was lost in admiration of the beauty of the drive from the station.

Constance was feeling most dreadfully nervous,—too much so to appreciate the scenery which called forth her sister's enthusiastic praises.

After a long drive through a thick wood, they emerged into open ground, sloping away on one side towards a river, with woods beyond,—on the other, covered with

heather and the now golden - coloured bracken ; they afterwards entered an avenue of noble old trees, when suddenly, and without warning, they came upon the house — large and old - fashioned, in the Elizabethan style, and standing in deep shadow against a glorious sunset sky, with a large lake lying rather below it.

Nothing could be more striking, and an involuntary expression of admiration burst from both sisters. The house seemed a very large one, with terrace walks raised on each side of the entrance-door, on the steps of which Constance saw her husband standing, his arm in a sling.

With his free hand he opened the door of the brougham and handed out his wife, and leading her into the first hall, threw

his arm round her, and kissed her passionately, whispering meanwhile,—

“Oh, my darling wife! Thank God, I have you back again! Promise you will never leave me again!”

“I promise,” murmured Constance, in a low, agitated voice.

And then, suddenly remembering Beatrice, he turned and greeted her with brotherly warmth, telling her how welcome she was.

“And now,” he said, “you must both come into the inner hall, where you will find a goodly number of people awaiting their new mistress, and then you shall rest and have your tea.”

Constance felt almost alarmed at the imposing array of servants who had col-

lected at the foot of the principal staircase.

“This,” said Hubert, as he advanced with his wife leaning on his arm, “is a very dear old friend of mine, our good housekeeper, Mrs Collins, who has lived with us ever since I can remember, and has tyrannised over me since I was a baby; but goodness only knows what we should do without her!”

“Oh, my lord, it is too bad of you to give me such a character! What will her ladyship think of me?” replied Mrs Collins, as she curtsied lowly to her new mistress, who held out her hand cordially to greet the old woman.

“The other servants you will, no doubt, make acquaintance with later,” continued

Hubert ; "and I sincerely trust they will all do their utmost to give you satisfaction."

Murmurs of assent were heard on all sides.

"And this," resumed Hubert, "is my new sister, Miss Annesley, and a better one no man ever had."

As Constance passed on with her husband to the drawing - room, she might almost have overheard the loud comments passed on her beauty.

"And now you two weary ones will rejoice in some tea," cried Hubert ; "it is all ready for you."

The drawing-room was a very long room, hung with crimson silk, with pictures on the walls, and a splendid old ceiling,

richly gilt ; in every respect a very handsome, though at the same time a comfortable room, and both Constance and her sister were loud in their expressions of approval.

After tea, Hubert took them upstairs to see their private apartments. He first led his wife into a boudoir, especially furnished for her,—a lovely room, hung with pale blue damask, and containing everything that could ensure comfort and convenience.

“ It is too lovely,” said Constance. “ And did you really have all this furnished for me ? ”

“ Of course I did ; I do not think anything can be too good for its mistress,” replied Hubert gaily.

A tear shone in Constance’s eye. She

took his hand and pressed it warmly, and then rather shyly pressed her lips to his cheek.

“I am so glad you like it,” replied her husband, in a low voice, as he passed his arm over her shoulder, and whispered in her ear,—

“Only be happy in it, my darling—that is all I ask.”

He then led her into her bedroom and dressing-room, and showed her his own room beyond.

“And now for our little sister’s room ; it is to be her very own room, and kept for her sole use.”

He had selected a charming room for Beatrice, large and airy, partly furnished as a sitting-room, and not very far from the rooms occupied by themselves.

“ There is a staircase here,” he observed, “ which leads to my den, and to the rest of the house; so we shall have ourselves to ourselves.”

“ I feel exhausted with admiration. It is a novel sensation, and I have so little experience of it, that I shall subside on to this delicious sofa,” said Beatrice, “ and leave you two to take care of each other. Should I fall asleep, I hope somebody will have the charity to come and wake me ; for, in spite of these new experiences, I have a strong desire not to lose my dinner.”

After taking off his wife’s wraps, and drawing the sofa nearer to the fire, which had been lighted, as the evening was chilly, Hubert asked her whether he should

leave her, so that she might try and sleep.

"I am not at all sleepy," replied Constance, "and I would much rather you stayed with me, for I want to hear all about your accident, and how you are feeling ! for you are not looking well, and—and—" she said, in a low voice, "I have so much to tell you—so much that I want to talk to you about. Besides, if you leave me alone, I shall feel quite lost in this enormous house and all this magnificence ; you know you are the only thing in it which makes me feel I am at home."

Hubert sat down in a low chair by her side, and stroking back her glossy hair, he gazed rapturously at the lovely upturned face.

“ Is it really true—not a dream ? ” he asked, at last. “ Do you mean that you will love me, my own wife ? ”

“ I do,” she replied, in a firm voice ; “ how can I help it, when I know all your goodness to me ; and I want to tell you how very sorry I am, more than I can say.”

“ And I want not to hear you tell me,” he replied, closing her lips with a kiss.

The happiest hours Hubert Denzil had ever spent since the day of his marriage were those he spent that evening with his wife.

It was long after the gong had sounded for dressing before Lady Denzil made her appearance in her bedroom, and to the dismay of the faithful Stevens objected to the dress prepared for her, selecting another

which she knew her husband had always admired. In spite of fatigue and excitement, never had Constance looked more radiantly beautiful than she did on the first night that she sat at the head of her husband's table.





CHAPTER III.

JANUARY had set in, cold and bleak, and Beatrice once more found herself established at Denzilmere, after having spent one month in London with her father. To her great relief it had then been finally decided that her home should be principally with the Denzils. Many considerations had induced her father to consent to this arrangement, and none more so than the reflection that his second daughter would be more likely to make a

good marriage if she remained with her sister. He had expressed his disapprobation at the prospect of a marriage between Beatrice and her lover. He thought she ought to do better, though at the same time he declared that he should not refuse his consent, had she not herself raised a difficulty in the way of the marriage. The only person who had fully sympathised with Beatrice in her sorrow had been Hubert; he quite understood her scruples with regard to Miss Hughes. Constance asserted that they were far-fetched and Quixotic; even Sir John did not seem to be wholly with her, but he respected her firmness in adhering to what she considered her duty. He had written to Hubert lately, telling him that his heart ached for his nephew, who was looking ill,

worn and harassed. How it would end he could make no guess ; but as Miss Hughes was to come over to England in the spring, or early summer, he had resolved to have an interview with the young lady herself, and if an appeal to her feelings produced no effect, he had a hope that she might be bought off, as he expressed it, disgusting as the thought was ; and were such a thing possible, more than ever should he be thankful at his nephew's escape from such a miserable fate.

This information he begged Hubert to keep to himself.

A large party had been assembled at Denzilmere, including among others Madame Arlini and her two children ; the Basileffs, who were spending their winter in Paris,

had come over, leaving their mother in France. The Marchese was settled at Melton for the hunting season. Mr Wilmington was also of the party, having previously paid them several visits. He was a great friend of Hubert's, and they had many tastes in common. He lived only ten miles from the Denzils, being the owner of a large property, with a fine old Gothic mansion standing on it, a house not only interesting in itself, but containing a rare and valuable collection of pictures.

Beatrice had taken a great liking to him, and had a very real appreciation of his society. She had on one occasion accompanied her sister and Hubert to pay a visit to his mother, who lived with him : a most charming old lady. The party had been a

merry one, and the girl had striven hard to exert herself, and take an interest in what was passing around her ; but she felt that the struggle was telling on her. Nothing had, perhaps, really helped her more than the companionship of Madame Arlini, to whom she had told all her troubles unreservedly. She found her so full of sympathy, and her quiet and often rather sad manner did not jar on her as the wild spirits of Marie Basileff, who was ever ready to flirt or talk with every one she met. Mr Wilmington's society had lately become less pleasant to her, because she was conscious that he singled her out more especially, and seemed always on the look out for every opportunity of being with her, though there was nothing obtrusive in his attentions. There had been

a good deal of gaiety too : a Christmas tree, especially for Marie's benefit, whose enjoyment of it was almost childish ; a ball in the neighbourhood, to which they had gone with a very large party. Constance, who was looking lovely, and blazing with diamonds, as Marie expressed it, had declared that she felt very proud of her party,—her young ladies were all very good-looking, and the men of the party tall and distinguished in appearance, in which observation Marie cordially joined, exclaiming,—

‘ Yes, indeed, I think we are all perfection, and the men are a great contrast to those who grow down here ; they are really upstanding men,—quite yards of them.’

And, then, to please his wife, Hubert had

consented to give a ball, beginning with some “tableaux vivants,” which were a great success, managed by the Marchesa and the Basileffs. Sir John Hardcastle was not the least attractive of the guests, and Beatrice found comfort in merely looking at him, as she naïvely said, but, as he told her, however much his thoughts were engrossed by the subject on which hers were ever dwelling, he would not let her talk of it.

“ Try not to nurse your sorrow, child ; you must endeavour to live a little more out of yourself.”

“ I will try,” she had answered, humbly ; “ but it is very hard ; they all seem so happy, and he is all alone.”

“ Why cannot pleasant things last for

ever ? ” said Marie Basileff, the day she and her sister were returning to London, *en route* for Paris. “ I have been so happy here.”

“ Well, you are not going to a prison, I expect,” replied Sir John. “ You will be fluttering like a butterfly at all the balls in Paris soon, trying to win all hearts.”

“ I am never going to marry a Frenchman ! ” cried Marie, with energy. “ I hate them ! I will only marry an Englishman ; so you must find me a nice one, Sir John, only not a moonlight man, like Mr Wilmington,” she added, in an aside, as she turned to Beatrice ; “ but it is lucky I do not want him. He is already at your feet, Bee. Do not look so horrified,” she cried, laughing. “ Why, anyone but a baby could see it. Could they not, Sir John ? ”

“Then you are a baby,” replied Beatrice; “and a very naughty, spoilt one, too.”

Madame Arlini was the sole guest remaining, and the small party subsided into a calm, quiet life.

The greatest comfort at this time to Beatrice was the happy understanding which seemed to exist between Constance and her husband. At times it seemed hardly possible to Beatrice that her sister could have changed so entirely. Conty's manner to her husband was always considerate. She seemed to find pleasure in being with him, frequently even seeking him of her own accord; and Hubert, though every word and look he gave his wife marked his devotion to her, was at the same time very firm and gentle with her. How

wise he was, Beatrice reflected, for unless he was resolved to hold his own, sooner or later Constance would take advantage of it. Hers was a nature requiring to be governed. That her sister found it easy to be happy, Beatrice readily understood. Nobody was more keenly alive to the advantages of the position she enjoyed than Conty, or more capable of enjoying the luxury and beauty of her home. And yet, thought the girl, it must be a shallow nature to be able so soon to change and adapt itself to different circumstances. She felt she could never herself have done so; yet a feeling of great thankfulness came over her, for Hubert seemed so thoroughly happy and contented.

“ Ah!” she said at last to herself, “ Conty

will end in idolising Hubert, now that she has forgotten Guy, and she will soon persuade herself, and probably Hubert too, that she never really loved anyone but him." And then she checked herself, wondering whether she was not becoming uncharitable and censorious in her judgment of others. "I must not let my own sorrow make me hard, or I shall become odious."

One afternoon Beatrice started for a solitary walk, intending to call at a cottage and leave a message about a boy, whom she had asked Hubert to find employment for in the garden. She had occupied herself a good deal in visiting the labourers' cottages, and occasionally Conty accompanied her, as Hubert had expressed a wish she should do so. Constance had gone out driving

with her husband, and Madame Arlini had been afraid to venture out, her cough being very troublesome. To-day Beatrice was feeling more depressed than usual, and intensely irritated against her sister, with whom she had been having a conversation before leaving the house.

Constance had been telling her that she ought not to be blind to the feelings entertained for her by Mr Wilmington. She pointed out to Beatrice that the barrier existing between herself and Allan Barrington was of her own creation ; her marriage with him was therefore an impossibility. She urged her sister strongly, not to throw away her chance of securing the affections of a man so eminently qualified to make her a good husband. She also reminded

her that by marrying Mr Wilmington they would be always living near each other. Beatrice had decidedly negatived the idea, and begged that no more should be said on the subject; but Constance had persisted, and asked, in a manner which had nettled Beatrice, whether she was prepared to pass the rest of her life in caring for a man she could not marry? or what would be still worse, she had added, in a tone of virtuous indignation, in caring for another woman's husband? That reflection surely, she considered, ought to induce her sister to try and turn her thoughts away from Allan,—and what better chance would she have of enabling her to do so than trying to take an interest in one so well suited to make her happy as Mr Wilmington?

Beatrice had listened ; all colour had faded from her cheek, and it was with the greatest difficulty she had restrained herself from speaking. Finally Constance had added,—

“ Hubert, I feel sure, quite agrees with me.”

“ Does he ? I am sorry to hear it,” replied the girl ; and without another word she had left the room.

Personally she had liked Mr Wilmington, but a feeling almost of hatred rose up in her heart against him at the suggestions made by Constance.

“ Oh, my darling ! ” sobbed the girl bitterly, as she pursued her way across the park, “ do they think I can forget you so soon ? am I not all yours, now and for ever ? ”

She walked fast, as if trying to quell the storm that had been raised within her. A conviction stole into her mind that the assertion that Hubert shared her views was a deliberate invention on Constance's part, and the thought somewhat comforted her. She soon found herself approaching the village, and hastened to regain her composure.

She found Mrs Jenkins, whom she was in quest of, standing at the door of her cottage, with her arms full of linen she had been drying. She seemed delighted at the sight of her visitor. A warm welcome was invariably accorded to the girl, who had already won all hearts in the cottages around. Beatrice discharged her errand, and settled that Mrs Jenkins should send

her son up early the following day to see the head gardener.

“Indeed, miss, I can never thank you enough for having spoken to his lordship. It will be a very great thing for Bill ; it will be the making of the lad. I only wish I could feel as happy about my eldest girl.”

“What is wrong with her ?”

“She is just a sore trouble to me, and I cannot do anything with her.”

“Is she ill ?” asked Beatrice kindly.

“Oh, she's all right enough in health, but she's fretting herself, and nearly driving me mad, about Ben Lambert ; and I won't hear of it nohow. I say, no girl should go and marry a man as hasn't got a character, nor means, nor nothing ; and Susan, she

is that obstinate, it a'most breaks my heart."

" Cannot anybody be happy when they love ? " thought the girl, beginning to feel interested. " Is he really a bad young man ? " she asked.

" There's worse, no doubt ; but that don't count for much," replied Mrs Jenkins ; " he never is in regular work, and was concerned in that last poaching affair at Squire Fletcher's, though he did get off somehow. How can I let my girl marry a man who can't support her ? No, I never heard any good of Ben Lambert except that they say he is kind to his bedridden grandmother, with whom he lives."

" Well that is something."

" But it wants a deal more to make a

good husband, miss ; but, if I might make so bold, would you mind just saying a word to Susan yourself ? ”

A weary feeling came over Beatrice, and she felt physically unfit to make the effort. No, she could not go and hear the poor girl’s story, and warn her, and influence her against the man she loved ; her own heart felt too sore and sick for that.

“ I will do so some day, but I fear I cannot to-day. I am tired, and have not the time now, but another time, Mrs Jenkins,” she said, as she rose to take her leave.

Should she return home ? No, she must wander about a little longer. Solitude was the one thing she craved for, and so she crossed the grass towards the river side,

right down to the banks, and watched the running water as it dashed over the boulders in its course, and finally, weary with her walk, she sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree, and burying her face in her hands, burst into tears. The sound of advancing footsteps quite close to her made her turn suddenly. Her heart seemed to cease beating as she saw the figure of a man approaching. Was this the response to the cry her heart and her lips had been sending forth, “Shall I ever see him again?” for before her, only a few paces distant, advancing towards her, she recognised the man for whom her heart was yearning.





CHAPTER IV.

“**B**EATRICE, my darling, I have wondered whether I should ever see you. For the last three days I have watched for you daily. I began to be almost in despair. I have ridden over from Morley every morning, leaving my horse at the village inn here, and to-day I caught sight of you at last going into a cottage, and I have watched for you ever since; don’t be angry with me, my love.”

He took her hands between his own and looked beseechingly in her face. She was shocked as she noticed the change in his appearance, the haggard, careworn look. His eyes seemed unnaturally large, and every feature bore traces of suffering. Her heart went out towards him in silent sympathy. How he had suffered, and for her !

“ Darling,” he began again, “ I have tried to keep away. My uncle made me promise not to see you. I have fought against myself, but it is useless ; I cannot give you up. Do not kill me. I mean, do not kill my life, my heart ; if it were only my body it would be nothing, there would be an end of it. That I should not shrink from, but I cannot bear my life away from

you, or tied to another woman. Oh, my God ! it is more than flesh and blood can bear, to think such a thing possible. Surely, in your inmost soul, you cannot think it right or reasonable that I should be bound to a life of utter misery for a few idle words spoken years ago ; and is it right that your life too should be sacrificed ? for you do love me, my own darling. Oh, Bee, my child," he continued, in a hoarse voice, as she looked up into his face with an expression of dumb misery, " be reasonable, don't murder me, for it is murder ; save me from such a hideous existence ; as your husband I can live and strive to be all I have wished, and hoped to be, but with her—No, I cannot, I will not think of it. Will you, can you send me away, my little

one?" his voice sinking to a passionate, pleading strain which thrilled every fibre in her nature: "send me away to a life little short of hell?"

"Oh, Allan, hush! you are mad to speak in that way."

"If loving you is madness, I am mad; if wishing we could live together, or die together, is madness, I am wholly mad; but live without you I cannot."

"Do not talk so wildly!" she cried; "you frighten me," and she clung to his arm as if in terror.

He saw she was moved, and continued, in an imploring voice, "Spare me then from such a fate. I cannot answer for what I shall do if you drive me from you. And can you think it would be for her happiness that

you should send me to her ? What sort of a husband do you think I should make her ? No, for all our sakes you must be mine ; only say the word. If you are afraid of encountering opposition, or of having to explain your change of purpose, be mine at once ; only say the word. In two, three days from hence be my wife ; I will arrange all, and when that is done, nothing can divide us ; we can defy the world."

" But we cannot forget, though," she moaned, as if in pain.

" We can forget all but ourselves ; none could part us then," he whispered, as his lips caressed her hair ; " think what that would be ;" he threw his arm round her and pressed her to his heart. " Here, now, my darling, your dear head upon my

breast, with your lips close to mine, can you say you will give me up? can you break your own heart as well as mine?"

" You are cruel, Allan, when you know I love you better than myself. Oh, it is so hard; and I have been so very unhappy. I have prayed so earnestly to do what is right, and yet I feel I cannot give you up; and I know it is so wrong, so dis-honourable."

" No," he whispered; " not when we love as we do, my love, my wife," and he kissed her passionately, while she clung to him trembling, so that he almost feared she would fall. He drew her to the tree on which she had been sitting, and rested her head against his shoulder, and murmured into her ear all the love that was in his heart.

"If it was only right to feel so happy!" she said, in a broken voice; "it spoils the happiness of being near you, the doubt that will keep coming into my mind."

And then he would breathe fresh assurances of his love, and she would listen as one in a dream. She began at last to remember nothing, to feel nothing, but that he was near her, and was her whole world. The growing darkness warned them that they must part. Reluctantly he let her go, extorting from her a promise to write to him on the day following, telling him whether he should communicate with his uncle and her father informing them that she had absolved him from his rash promise to Miss Hughes, and had consented to become his wife; or whether, as he pressed her

strongly, she would marry him at once, and then announce the fact to the members of her family ; but the look of horror which was manifested in the young girl's countenance at the bare suggestion of such a proceeding, sufficed to convince him of its impracticability. He accompanied her as far as the garden gate, and then struck rapidly across the park to the village inn.

How Beatrice got through that evening she hardly knew ; it was only by the greatest effort she could control herself sufficiently to speak and act in such a way as to avoid drawing attention to herself.

One person alone noticed the change in the girl, though she said nothing, beyond giving her a wistful glance, and kissing her more tenderly than usual when they parted

for the night, and that was Madame Arlini. She had a conviction that something had occurred which had strongly moved Beatrice, and she longed to follow her to her room and seek her confidence.

When at last Beatrice was alone, and free to think over the interview she had so recently had with Allan, she could remember nothing but his words of love and his tenderness; but as she grew calmer, she realised that, in spite of the feverish happiness running through her whole being, there was a pain mixed with it, and one that was growing in intensity, put it aside from her as she would. And then the question came before her—had she really and truly, of her own free will, promised to do the very thing she had prayed so earnestly to be

guarded from doing ? Had she broken all the resolutions she had formed after much bitter suffering ? Was she really about to deprive another woman of a happiness that was lawfully hers ?

“ But she cannot love him as I do,” murmured the girl ; “ hers is only a selfish love, or she would never sacrifice his happiness, and bind him to keep the rash promise he had made her so many years ago.”

It was a dreadful thought, that through his love for her he should do a dishonourable thing ; her love would then indeed be a curse to him. Beatrice, though she fully admitted the selfishness of Bessie Hughes’s conduct to Allan, had never yet been able to grasp the idea that such conduct was incompatible with love. It appeared to her

as the most simple impossibility, having once known him, not to be devoted to him.

She grew weary and impatient as all these different thoughts passed through her mind. She tried to put them away from her, endeavoured to persuade herself that, loving Allan as she did, her first duty was to secure his happiness ; but argument failed to silence the small, still voice which would make itself heard,—“ Was it beginning at the right end ? Was it well to start with wrong-doing in order to ensure happiness ? ” Fight against it as she would, the question was ever recurring to her.

She went to the window and gazed out on the still, peaceful night, with a vague feeling that with a change of scene might come a change of ideas.

It was a bright moonlight night. She watched the stars overhead. The perfect stillness seemed almost oppressive. She saw the grey tower of the church half hidden by the leafless trees, lighted up by the cold, pale moonlight, and she thought of the many prayers she had so lately offered there for help and comfort; how was she about to fulfil her resolutions? Still, could she break his heart as well as her own? She recalled the expression of his eyes as they looked into hers, the depth of tenderness written in them as she gave him the promise he asked; and was she to deprive him of all this, and send him alone—or worse—into the world? She turned away from the window; her thoughts pursued her, and throwing herself into a low chair

near the fire, she buried her face in her hands, striving to shut out the memories that crowded on her brain. For a long time she sat thus; her fire had gone out, she felt chilled and thoroughly exhausted. She would decide nothing till the morrow, she resolved, and sought her bed; but the oblivion she longed for would not come, and it was at a very late hour that she at last fell into a troubled sleep.

It was with a sensation of great weariness that Beatrice was awakened on the following morning by the entrance of the housemaid. For a few moments she felt stunned, and could not collect her thoughts—a semi-consciousness of some trouble hanging over her oppressed her; but before long memory returned, and then she realised that she was

bound at once to decide what she would write to Allan. She lay perfectly still, feeling almost too exhausted to move, watching the clouds as they travelled rapidly across the blue sky ; a vague longing possessed her that she were seated on one of the clouds, being carried whither she neither knew nor cared, so that she might get away from her misery. Over and over she kept repeating to herself, “ What shall I do ? I cannot give him up.” She writhed in an agony, clenching her small hands as if in pain. She tried to pray, but no words would come ; she felt as if her spiritual senses had been paralysed.

It was no use remaining in bed, she reflected, and rising, she opened the window. The morning was bright, sunny, and with an

almost spring-like feeling ; it was strangely warm for the time of year, and as Beatrice gazed out on the brown woods against a background of pale blue sky, a brilliant sunshine lighting up the grey trunks of the old trees, and casting wonderful gleams of light on the mere, she watched the wild fowl fluttering hither and thither ; on the high ground beyond she saw the speckled deer browsing, and it seemed to her as if all creatures were rejoicing. Was she specially to be excluded ?—she and her lover, were they alone to suffer—to find no joy here below ? And then the thought came to her of the smallness of her own existence ; if she died to-day in what respect would anything be changed ? All that she now surveyed would continue the same. Even he who occupied the larger

portion of her thoughts would have to live through his life as best he could. Sorrow and suffer as they might, were there not thousands bearing their daily burden without hope of change ? At any rate, there was at least in her own case one cause for thankfulness,—she had not brought this sorrow into her life by any fault of her own ; and as this thought came to her, came also the consciousness that she was, perhaps, now about to take a step which, in her own heart, she felt was not right. Could happiness come out of wrong-doing ? Would not it bring its own punishment sooner or later ? ever the same question which had haunted her without ceasing from the moment she had parted from her lover. She remembered there was a world where all sor-

row would cease, nay, more, be turned into joy; with her whole heart she believed in this truth, but how desperately hard it was to realise it fully, to give up this present life. How easy it was to tell others what was right, and how fearfully difficult to follow in the narrow way oneself. Unless one had suffered and had to crush under foot a terrible temptation, it was scarcely possible to be a judge of what such suffering cost.

A little robin came and perched on a branch of a rose trailing by her window; he eyed her boldly with his jet-black eyes, and hopped on to the window-sill with an impudent fearlessness. In spite of her trouble, Beatrice instinctively turned away to fetch some crumbs of biscuit she was in the habit

of spreading for him daily. Away he flew, carrying as large a bit as he found convenient in his flight. The girl watched him with a feeling akin to envy ; all creatures seemed to rejoice and be happy on this bright morning save herself, and as she bowed her aching head, she murmured that it was not she alone. Would *he* not suffer, when he got her letter telling him all was over ? suffer all the more because she had been weak enough to buoy him up with hopes that could never be realised ? But no, she would be weak no longer, she would write at once. It was good-bye to all happiness, and a great flood of pity for herself, as well as for him, rushed over her heart, as, closing the window, she hastily began to dress, and then sat down at her writing-

table. Several times she had to stop and dry the tears she was afraid would fall on her paper; but she hurried on, as if fearing her courage would break down. In a few broken-hearted sentences she told him she could not do as he wished, and as she longed to do. She begged him not to attempt again to see her, or write to her. She dared not trust herself to read over what she had written, but sealed her letter, and then for the first time asked herself how she was to send it? The difficulty of so doing had not hitherto occurred to her. Take it herself she dared not; the risk of meeting him again was not to be thought of. Finally, she determined to ask the butler to have it sent, though she shrank from the comments she felt sure he must

make upon her writing to Allan at the inn ; but the thing must be done, so she put her scruples aside. On going downstairs, she fortunately found him in the hall alone, and with as much indifference as she could assume, she asked him to have the letter sent to the inn at once, as Captain Barrington had said he should be passing through the village early that day. Then she hastened to the dining - room, glad to escape from the butler's eyes, who, well trained as he was, had betrayed a slight look of surprise at the request. She found them all at breakfast.

“ You are late, young woman,” said Hubert, as he rose to meet her. “ I am afraid you have a headache ; you are not looking quite yourself this morning.”

Beatrice assented, adding that she had slept badly, and seated herself hurriedly, as if to avoid further observation.

Breakfast being over, Madame Arlini, who had noticed every look and gesture of the girl sitting opposite to her, resolved to lose no time in following her, and having some explanation of the evident trouble which oppressed her. Beatrice had gone to the morning-room, which opened out of the drawing-room. When there was a small party in the house, they generally occupied that room during the first part of the day. Constance had disappeared, as was her wont, to have an interview with Mrs Collins, and Hubert had gone to his own room, so Madame Arlini felt confident that the chance she was longing for, of an

interview alone with Beatrice, would be easily obtained.

“Child,” she said, going up to the girl, who was sitting in a low chair near the fire, trying to get some warmth into her cold hands and feet, “you are unhappy, something has happened, and you must let me share your sorrow; you know how I love you, and it is cruel to me not to give me the one pleasure in my power, of trying to help and comfort you.”

Beatrice raised her hands to her face, and though she uttered no word, her companion saw her figure was shaken by her emotion.

“Something has happened since yesterday, and I want you to tell me all, Carina,” and the Marchesa drew up a little chair beside her friend.

“ Isabella, I am quite miserable ; there is no use talking of it. Just now I feel as if nothing anyone could say would help me.”

“ But tell me, little one ; a trouble shared is an alleviation to the one who suffers. I have found it so, as you well know.”

Briefly Beatrice recounted her interview with Allan. She told all ; her own weakness, and her subsequent repentance.

Madame Arlini listened without interrupting her, and when the story was ended she said, quietly,—

“ To a loving nature like yours, the pain you are giving is nearly unbearable. Still you have often said you wished your love to be a blessing to him. You are striving according to your light to make it so. It is not your fault that you

raised this storm in his heart, as you have many times told me. Why these trials are allowed, we know not; they are one of those mysteries of suffering ordained for us."

"But I feel so weak, myself. Do you know, Isabella, there are moments in which I feel I quite hate that girl. It is horrible; and so unjust."

"Intensely human, all the same," replied the Marchesa, with a sad smile.

"And then I feel that after all she may love him as much as I do, only it must be in a different way, for I could never wilfully make him unhappy."

"I should not fancy there were many points of resemblance between you and Miss Hughes. I can scarcely

wonder at his longing to have you for his wife instead of her."

"Still, Isabella, the thought haunts me that I have been the means of making him hate her. Before he knew me, he may not have cared for her as she did for him, but he could never have had the hatred to her which he feels now. If he had, it would have been impossible to have renewed his promise to marry her."

"It is useless to talk to me of Miss Hughes's love for Allan Barrington; it is an amiable delusion on your part, and a convenient assertion on hers."

"If I could only go away. I do not care where. I dread seeing or hearing from Allan. If I go to London he is sure to try and see me; he knows how weak I am.

Oh ! I long to go quite away, but there is no use thinking of it," said Beatrice wearily.

Madame Arlini made no reply. She seemed to be lost in thought. After some minutes, she rose from her seat.

" I have an idea," she said. " I am going to try and find Lord Denzil. I shall tell him what you have told me ; it would be wrong to leave him in ignorance of it. He has the tenderest interest in all that concerns you ; besides, it is essential that he should know all, if I am to accomplish what I have in my mind. I leave you alone, my Beatrice ; try to grow a little calmer."

" Yes, I like to be alone ; it is good for me. Solitude, silence, and reflection—they

are three excellent things; they help us more to conquer ourselves than anything else, and I am sure I want a good deal of self conquest just now."





CHAPTER V.

AFTER Madame Arlini had left Beatrice, she proceeded in the first instance to Lord Denzil's private sitting-room, where, at this hour, she felt sure of finding him. After having begged for a few minutes' conversation, she began at once to tell him what had passed between Beatrice and herself, to all of which Hubert listened with the deepest interest. He expressed a feeling almost of regret that she should have taken so de-

cided a view as to her duty with regard to Allan, for he could not help having a very great sympathy with the latter, and he said how very sincerely he deplored the unfortunate state of things between two people he cared so very much for. But Madame Arlini reminded him this was a case in which Beatrice was sacrificing the greatest happiness in life because of her conviction that to act otherwise would be a sin; she herself could hardly take the same view, but it was useless to argue the question. What was to be done under the present circumstances, was the thing to be thought of now. She wished to consult him and his wife as to the desirability of the only plan she could think of as meeting the present difficulty, and that was for her

to go over at once to Paris, taking Beatrice with her. Change of scene would be the best thing for the poor child, and perhaps help to restore a more healthy tone to her mind.

“ I will send for Conty,” Hubert replied ; “ we will hear what she says.”

Constance, on being appealed to, most vehemently expressed her disapprobation of her sister’s absurd scruples. She said she considered that it was wholly inconsistent with her ideas of justice, to wreck a man’s life in the way her sister was doing. She declared that she was disposed to put pressure on Beatrice, and insist on her either marrying Allan, or completely giving him up.

“ But she considers she has done the latter,” said Madame Arlini quietly.

“ I do not agree with you,” replied Lady Denzil. “ She clings to him still, and declares she will never marry any other man. Why, she was ready to quarrel with me yesterday, because I ventured to suggest she should not discourage so pointedly Mr Wilmington’s attentions.”

“ Surely you cannot expect her to be willing to listen to words of love from any other man at present ? ” replied Madame Arlini, in a tone of astonishment. “ Why, the very idea of such a thing would be like applying a blister to a sore place. Time alone can heal her sorrow. She is young, and it is all we must hope for.”

“ You are quite right,” said Hubert. “ And now as to your plan for taking Beatrice to Paris. Do you not think it is the

best thing to be done ? ” he asked, turning to his wife.

“ Yes ; I see nothing else to be done. I cannot help, however, feeling that she is going as a martyr to the stake, and for no purpose. Of course, I am only too glad she should go, dear Madame Arlini, though I shall miss her sadly.”

“ Then we will consider the matter settled,” replied Madame Arlini, with alacrity ; “ we will leave here the day after to-morrow, sleep in London, and on the day following start for Paris. I will send a telegram to-day to tell my servants to have everything ready for us.”

“ We can never be sufficiently grateful to you, dear Marchesa,” said Hubert warmly.

“ I know how safe our dear little Bee will be in your hands.”

Beatrice, when informed by her friend of the arrangement she had made for her, laid her head down on the Marchesa’s shoulder, and sobbed like a child.

“ Oh, Isabella, how good you are to me. I have not lost everything, after all ; for so much love is very precious.”

A few days later saw Madame Arlini and her charge settled in Paris. For the first few days they went out but little, for the Marchesa had felt the fatigue of her journey a good deal. An undefined fear took possession of the girl’s heart as she watched her friend. She could not but notice how fragile she looked :—the loss of strength, the feverish hands, and the eyes which seemed

to grow larger daily. That the Marchesa was unhappy about her husband she well knew. Nothing, perhaps, helped her more in bearing her own sorrow, than the constant care she bestowed on her friend ; ever on the watch to spare her any fatigue, to anticipate her slightest wish, to prevent her from tiring herself in playing with her children,—for Madame Arlini seemed to grow more and more devoted to them, and could scarcely bear them out of her sight.

After they had been a week in Paris, Madame Arlini took Beatrice to see several of the principal sights, and when she was not equal to going herself, sent her governess or her maid with her. The girl also visited some of the hospitals and charitable institutions, all of which interested her

greatly. Her friend seemed determined that she should not lack occupation. The evenings, too, were very pleasant, as Madame Arlini generally received her friends at that time, and Beatrice found herself in quite a new world. She met many really remarkable people, both old and young, and derived the greatest pleasure from hearing the conversations that generally went on, for they were of a type of which she had hitherto had no experience. She enjoyed listening to the Marchesa's ready wit, and it delighted her to see the admiration and homage which were paid her on all sides.

“ And this is the woman,” she thought, “ whom that brute of a man neglects.”

The Basileffs often joined the evening

circle. Sophie appeared to find herself very much in her element, and Marie would seat herself at the piano in the smaller drawing-room, and play delicious snatches of all sorts of music, old and modern. One of the greatest pleasures Beatrice found, was sitting in the church of St Roc, with her friend, listening to the grand organ ; for though she played so little herself, she was passionately fond of music.

Altogether, though her heart was never free from the thought of the man she loved so dearly, her life was not unhappy, and she strove to her utmost to appear cheerful and contented. The children, too, were a great occupation and interest to her.

“ You will be kind to my little ones, Bee,

if I am called away from them?" Madame Arlini would sometimes ask sadly, and Beatrice would answer, as brightly as she could, though she felt as if a shock of cold water had been poured down her back at the question,—

"Dear Isabella, nothing is too much that I could do for anything that belongs to you, but please God I shall never be called upon. I pray their mother will be always near them."

"It is wrong for me to sadden you, dear child, but something tells me my life will not be a long one, and the thought of my children haunts me day and night."

"Oh, please, do not speak in that way, Isabella, darling; when the weather gets warmer you will be better. It is the bitter cold that makes you feel ill."

Often afterwards did Beatrice recall these words to her mind.

One morning early, Beatrice was sitting in a small room where she and Madame Arlini generally passed the morning. She was alone, the Marchesa not having yet left her bedroom. She was painting hard, trying to finish a sketch she had made of the two children, as a surprise for their mother. The door opened, and in walked Marie Basileff, who had not waited for the servant to escort her upstairs.

“I am early, Bee, and out of breath with running up the stairs,” and she flung herself on the sofa.

“Why did you hurry so much?” asked Beatrice, laughing; “the day is quite young yet.”

“Because I am full of news, and I am

bursting to tell it you ; but you would never guess what it is if you tried for a week."

" Which I shall certainly not do, for I am quite as curious as they say all our sex are ; so if you have quite recovered, pray begin."

" Well, Constantine—you know who I mean, our cousin—is to arrive in Paris to-night. He has been very ill, nearly dying ; he fought a duel, it appears, and was shot through the upper part of one lung. Sophie is miserable, and mamma is in despair, for you know she is devoted to Constantine ; and who do you suppose has been nursing him all this time,—in fact, never left him night or day for the last fortnight ? Why, your friend the moon-

light man! I will never say another word against him. He is a regular brick."

"Oh! Marie, I am so sorry for Sophie. She will feel this dreadfully. A duel, too; —it is terrible!"

"Mr Wilmington, in his letter, which came last night, says Constantine was not to blame about the duel—it was forced upon him; but Sophie does feel it, I can tell you. When the telegram came yesterday morning—Monday—stating that Constantine had been dangerously ill, but was better, and would arrive to-night, she turned ghastly white, but said very little, and mamma was quite angry, and said she was heartless, and absolutely without feeling. I followed Sophie to her room soon after, and knocked at the door. Receiving

no answer, I went in, and found her lying on the floor, her head only an inch from the fender. Only think, had she struck her head against it, she might have been killed! I was horribly frightened, and called Fräulein and her maid Justine, but it was some time before she became conscious ; and just fancy mamma saying that Sophie did not feel ! I suppose she cannot understand anyone having such a different nature from her own, for when she is excited or unhappy, she goes on like a madwoman, and is even capable of throwing her brushes at anyone who may be unfortunate enough to offend her."

"Dear Marie, do try to remember you are speaking of your mother."

"Well, I cannot help it. Mr Wilming-

ton, in his letter of last night, says the duel took place three weeks ago, but that Constantine would not let him write till he was better. He exonerates him from all blame about the duel, as I told you. We have a room, fortunately, for Mr Wilmington, as papa is away. Constantine will like having him near him, and I shall be very glad too; I shall want somebody to talk to, for I know they will all be so *triste*. I wish he was a little more lively though; I do not think I could flirt with him if I tried; I hate people who look at one from a height."

"Well, he cannot help that, seeing he is at least six feet high, and you are a mite, Marie."

"How stupid you are; I don't mean

because he is tall ; but when I say something he does not approve of, he never contradicts me, but only smiles, just as the moon glances at the earth ; I declare he makes me feel quite chilly.”

“But why do you say things he does not approve of ?” asked Beatrice, laughing.

“Because his superiority-airs aggravate me. I know I make myself out worse than I am. I should not like that sort of a man for a husband. I agree with the American woman, who said,—‘ Husband and wife are one, and the woman is *the one*. ’ Now Sophie has just got what I want, and won’t take it. Constantine is so handsome, Bee, and such a *bon enfant*. However, there is no danger of Mr Wilmington falling in love

with me, for you know he is already hopelessly in love with someone else."

"What nonsense you talk, Marie ; it is not the first time you have said the same thing ; those sort of remarks are not in good taste."

"Well, if you are going to scold, I shall go. You are a priggish English girl ; I suppose you cannot help it ; but you are too nice to quarrel with, so I forgive you, my child. I give you my blessing ; if you don't care for it send it back by post. Adieu ; seriously, I must depart."

After Marie had gone away, Beatrice sat back idly ; the remark about Mr Wilmington had disturbed her, for it recalled to her mind several things which tended to confirm the impressions conveyed to her by her

sister, and by Marie, as to his feeling towards her. Could anything be more painful, she asked herself, than to be the object of love to a man whom she both liked and esteemed, and to know how utterly out of her power it was ever to return his affection ? Though she could never marry Allan, it was equally impossible she could ever marry any other man. And yet, as she was young, it would probably be her fate to meet people who might grow to care for her. She could not go about the world labelled, as a caution to others ; but if it were to happen, how much it would add to her own sorrow, having to inflict pain on others. But after all, she reflected, it was scarcely wise to anticipate evils before they arrived. Life was like a

strong current, it was useless to attempt to stem it or drive it out of its course. What was ordained for her of pain or pleasure was inevitable, and must be borne with patience and courage.

Nearly a week had elapsed since Marie had announced the arrival of Count Orisky and Mr Wilmington, and the latter had already paid Madame Arlini several visits. He was a great favourite of hers, and always received a very cordial welcome.

Constance had written more than once asking when Beatrice was likely to return to them, though she urged her to remain as long as she wished. Madame Arlini was anxious to keep Beatrice till she herself should be returning to England. A cousin of her husband's had married an English-

man, a Sir Jasper Fletcher, a Roman Catholic, and the owner of a lovely old place in Yorkshire ; he was in the diplomatic service, and had offered the Arlinis the use of his house for the summer months, an offer which the Marchese had accepted ; and it was arranged that Madame Arlini and the children should proceed there early in May. Various reasons induced the Marchese to remain in England for the present, the principal one being that the cousin to whom he was devoted, and whom Madame Arlini had spoken of as the destroyer of her happiness, was then settled in England,—her husband being attached to the Italian embassy there. Beatrice would gladly have remained with her friend till the end of April, but

Constance and her husband were projecting a visit to Norway in the yacht of a great friend of Hubert's, and they were both anxious that she should accompany them, so it was ultimately settled she should join them in London the second week in April.

“I am glad to find you at home,” said Marie Basileff, who called one day quite late, just after Beatrice had returned from a drive with the Marchesa, “for I have something to tell you. Wonders will never cease!—but this time my news is good. Sophie is going to marry Constantine!”

“I am glad, Marie; how sincerely I trust she may be happy! Tell me all about it, and when it was all settled; I thought he was so ill.”

“ Only yesterday it was settled, and it is just because he is ill she is going to marry him, for you know Sophie is one of those people who do unaccountable things. But seriously, Constantine is very much changed since his illness. The doctors say he will get quite strong again, but he ought to go to a warm climate now. He is often very depressed, but his devotion to Sophie is quite touching ; he can hardly bear her out of his sight, and so Sophie has resolved on marrying him at once, so that she may be always with him. It is a very stupid way of being married ; there will be no wedding party—no fun ; in fact, they will be married in the drawing-room, quite privately ; her *trousseau*, of course, will not be ready, but I do not think she cares for that.”

“She loves Constantine,” said Beatrice ;
“is not that enough ?”

“Well she might have married him some time ago, and we should have had a gay wedding ?”

“Oh, Marie ! you know nothing about love.”

“*Tant mieux.* I think you and Sophie are very sentimental people, and addicted to all sorts of impossible and even uncomfortable ideas,” replied the girl, laughing. “Anyhow, the marriage takes place next Thursday, and they start for Marseilles that evening on their way to Cairo. Dr Höhler goes with them. Mamma is pleased, because she has at last got her way about Sophie marrying Constantine. Papa is also in very good

humour, and, as a proof of it, he took me to Baudin the jeweller's this morning, and gave me a lovely cross of diamonds and turquoises. By - the - bye, Sophie wants most particularly to see you any day before half - past eleven; and mamma wants to know whether you and the Marchesa will come and see us to-morrow evening; there is no party, you know."

"I will ask her, and send you a line."

"Dear Mr Wilmington will be with us. Sophie and Constantine cannot exist without him. She declares it is his influence which has done so much for Constantine, and he has changed very much I believe, for though he was always charming, I am afraid he was rather a *vaurien*. I laugh at

Sophie and tell her if she was not so much in love with Constantine, she would fall a victim to Mr Wilmington's charms."

"He is a thoroughly good man, I am quite sure," replied Beatrice heartily.

"Yes; but he is not fascinating in my eyes; he is so cold and reserved; in fact, he is very English."

"You do not expect me to say he is any the worse for that, Marie?" replied Beatrice, laughing. "I should count it an extra charm."

"*Chacun à son goût!* I like more animation, more life about a man; and now good-bye. Mind you come and see Sophie."

"Be sure you give her my love, and my best wishes."



CHAPTER VI.

HE Marchesa had gone out driving with Sophie Basileff, and Beatrice, who had been sitting with the latter a great part of the morning, had remained at home, and was busily engaged in arranging a lovely basket of flowers, which had been sent that morning to Madame Arlini. The two children were watching her with great interest.

“How I love flowers!” said Nina, the

eldest girl, a slight, stately little damsel of seven years old, with splendid dark eyes, like her mother's; "do you know, Bee, that when I look at them, it gives me quite a hungry feeling for them ?"

" Which means to say, Nina, that you are longing to possess some for your very own, so you may choose three out of these lovely roses."

" And some for me too," cried little Carlotta, in her shrill voice.

" Not if you go on pulling them about as you are doing, Lotta. Do you know what I think ? it is, that you are a very troublesome little monkey."

" But I did not ask you what you thought," replied the child, clapping her hands, and making a dash at the roses,

which she seized quickly, chuckling with glee.

Beatrice could not keep from smiling as she watched the fairy-like child dancing about with her long hair waving over her shoulders.

“Hark ! there is the bell,” said Nina ; “perhaps it is the little mother come back ! ” whereupon they both rushed from the room.

“Oh, no !” cried Nina, as she returned, with a look of disappointment ; “it is not *la mamma*, it is a tall English gentleman, and when Pietro told him that she was out, he asked for you.”

“For me, Nina ! Are you sure ? Who can it be ? ”

She felt her heart beating. Who could

wish to see her, save one, and he, she believed, was far away? Surely he would never be so cruel as to follow her again.

Her doubts were solved in another moment, as Mr Wilmington followed the servant, little Lotta clinging to his hand.

"The Marchesa is out," said Beatrice, as soon as she recovered from her surprise.

"So I heard, but I ventured to ask for you, Miss Annesley. I hope I have not been indiscreet in so doing?"

Beatrice glanced at his face, and noticed he was looking paler than usual and somewhat agitated or nervous, and a very uncomfortable feeling took possession of her, which was still further increased by the appearance of the governess, who suddenly

entered and called the children to their lessons.

“ You are not looking well to-day, Miss Annesley. Are you tired ? ”

Beatrice murmured something about having rather a headache, and turned to her flowers again, as if to avoid his scrutiny.

“ When I first saw you on my arrival, it struck me how much brighter and happier you were looking than when I last saw you at Denzilmere. You must forgive my saying so, but everything that concerns you is a matter of deep interest to me ; that, I think, you must already know.”

“ You are very kind,” stammered Beatrice, at a loss what to say, a dread creeping over her of what he might say next.

“I heard the Marchesa was out, and, for the first time, did not regret missing her, for it enabled me to see you alone, which is what I have long wished to do. Once at Denzilmere I thought I had got the chance, for I saw you enter the church one day, just as I was going up to the house, and thought I might be able to return with you, but I found you kneeling, and in such evident distress, that I did not venture to interrupt you. I longed more than I can say to ask you the cause of your sorrow, but I felt such a step was hardly justifiable.”

Beatrice turned away quickly; she well remembered the occasion to which he referred. She had been more oppressed with her sorrow than usual, and had gone into

the church, which was kept open during the whole day; there she had thrown herself on her knees, and had given vent to a flood of tears, before she was able to pray and ask for the help she so sorely needed; but it was a shock to her to think that there should have been a witness of her grief.

“I cannot beat about the bush,” continued Ernest Wilmington; “for it is not my habit. I want to ask you whether you will give me any hope of securing your affections? Whether you will allow me the happiness of being always with you to share in your sorrows as well as in your joys,—in other words, whether you will become my wife. Do not answer in a hurry,” he continued, in a tremulous

voice; “you are not a girl to be lightly wooed or won; loving, with you, means something almost solemn; your love will be beyond price to him who can obtain that love—that inestimable treasure. I do not ask you whether you care for me now as I care for you, but whether you will give me a chance of winning such a love? I have loved you for months. I can hardly expect you should be able at once to feel the same for me, but tell me if you will try and love me. Remember, the question I am asking you is one that affects my whole life, therefore, I beseech you, think well before you give me an answer.”

“I cannot delay; there is no need for me to think,” replied Beatrice, in a voice almost inaudible from emotion. “It would

be impossible to make you understand how bitterly sorry I am for what you have just told me. I thank you with all my heart for your kindness to me, and it hurts me horribly to give you pain, but there is no help for it. What you ask me is quite impossible ; I can never promise to try and love you, or to marry you."

His face turned, if possible, a shade paler than before.

"Why is it impossible ? am I personally disagreeable to you ? Do not be afraid to speak openly."

"I like you very much," replied Beatrice, raising her eyes, in which two large tears were trembling ; "and I feel very proud, very grateful, that you should think so well of me ; but," she continued hurriedly, as

she noted the look of relief which had spread over his face at her words, “there is a reason why what you ask and wish for can never be ; I love someone else.”

She covered her face with her hands to hide the deep flush which had risen with her words. A sharp pain shot through her companion’s heart.

“ It was what I had almost feared,” he said, more as if he were speaking his thoughts aloud than addressing her ; “ I was only afraid of that.”

“ I wish to be quite honest with you,” continued Beatrice ; “ in fact, I should be dealing very wrongly with you if I were not. I am not going to be married, but I can never care about anyone but him.”

“ Will you tell me all ? ” asked Mr Wil-

mington, in a husky voice. “ I do not wish to pain you unnecessarily, but I do not quite understand you. Is your engagement broken off ? ”

“ I cannot explain it to you ; it is nobody’s fault. The man whom I love, and who wants to marry me, is bound in honour to marry another woman.”

“ Then, in the name of Heaven, what right had he to win your affections ? ” asked Mr Wilmington angrily. “ You are not the sort of girl to give your love unsought.”

“ It was all a miserable mistake,” replied Beatrice, trying to speak calmly.

“ But, Miss Annesley ! Beatrice ! you do not mean to tell me that at your age—for you are little more than a child—you

can imagine it possible to spend the rest of your life living on a memory ! Time must change your feelings, and then, please God, you will not reject my love. I will wait patiently, for years even, only give me one word of hope."

"I cannot ; please do not ask me," said the girl, in a pleading voice. "Of course, you have a right to think I may some day change ; but I know myself well enough to feel sure I shall never do so. And you are a great deal too good to marry anybody who does not care for you with their whole heart."

"Nor can I honestly say I should be contented to do so," replied Mr Wilmington, smiling ; "but you will change some day," he continued, in a more hopeful voice ; "it

is not in human nature to go on caring for a man who is married to another woman, and more especially a man who has treated you in such an unjustifiable manner."

"You must not say that," replied Beatrice, a frown contracting her forehead. "He has not behaved badly, and I pity him more than I pity myself."

"I shall allow myself to hope, nevertheless," replied Mr Wilmington, after a pause. "Beatrice, if you only knew the depth of love and tenderness that is in my heart for you! My whole life should be spent in trying to make you happy. My old mother, who knows how I care for you, is longing to welcome you as her child."

“ You will believe me,” asked Beatrice, lifting her soft, dark eyes to his, “ when I tell you how truly grieved I am to cause you this pain; it seems so hard not only to be unhappy myself, but to make others unhappy.”

“ I fully and entirely believe you,” he replied, sadly; “ but, as I said before, I cannot and will not abandon all hope. And now I will leave you, and may every blessing be yours.”

When Madame Arlini returned, she found Beatrice, her eyes red, and looking the picture of misery. The story was soon told.

“ I am sorry, really and truly sorry for Mr Wilmington,” replied the Marchesa. “ Had your heart been free, I could have

wished you no better husband. And indeed, child, he is quite right; the day must come when you will be able to love someone, though not so well or in the same way as Allan perhaps, and then I will wish him God-speed in his wooing."

"Oh ! Isabella, never say such a thing to me," said Beatrice, almost angrily. "I shall never, never, as long as I live, even try to like another man. You are horrid to suggest such a thing."

The days passed rapidly, and Beatrice began to dread the moment when she should be obliged to leave her friend, for she had realised how much the latter seemed to cling to her. Each day revealed to her some new charm, some fresh

trait in the Marchesa's character. If Beatrice's power of sympathy had first attracted Madame Arlini towards her, she herself proved in no wise deficient in that quality. When she first brought Beatrice to Paris, she had resolved to try and persuade the young girl to strive earnestly against the habit of constantly dwelling on her sorrow. She furnished her with plenty of occupation, and of a kind to which Beatrice was not accustomed. She insisted on her trying to improve her French, and made her read aloud in Italian. It was an entirely new life to Beatrice, and in spite of the sorrowful thoughts which would perpetually recur to her, she enjoyed it very much.

The first break which occurred in the

peaceful and quiet existence Madame Arlini and her young friend led, came in the shape of a visit from the Marchese, who joined them in Paris for three weeks, and during that time Beatrice realised more fully than she had done hitherto how miserable an existence her friend must have had during the eight years of her married life. At some moments the girl felt as if it were almost an effort beyond her, to control the expression of her sentiments towards the Marchese. The aversion she felt for him was increased by his persistent devotion to her, and the way he expressed his admiration for her nearly drove her mad. Daily he brought her offerings of flowers or bon-bons, all of which Beatrice received

in the iciest manner, and in his presence bestowed them on the children. His brutal rudeness to his wife made her blood boil; and for the first time in her life Beatrice knew what it was to hate a fellow-creature. The children shrunk from his caresses, which he lavished on them when he was in the mood. They cowered often at the remembrance of the frightful bursts of passion of which they had been witnesses. Sometimes he would insist on taking Nina in his phaeton to the Bois de Boulogne, and the child, with tears in her eyes, would implore her mother to let her stay at home. But Madame Arlini was very firm with them, he was their father, and if he liked them to be with him they must never refuse.

On speaking one day with Beatrice of her husband's conduct towards herself, she said, "He is the father of my children, that I shall never forget ; he is the man I once loved almost idolatrously, but he has killed my love ; no love could survive such contempt as I feel for him."

One day the Marchese had lost his temper at luncheon, owing to his wife refusing to call on a lady whom he expressed a wish she should be civil to. Beatrice dared not remain longer in the room than she could help, and left with the children, her face scarlet, and her small hands tightly clenched. She had walked to the window and was gazing idly into the street. On turning away, later on, she noticed with some surprise little Lotta

kneeling beside the sofa, her hands folded, her face upturned, and the childish lips uttering a prayer in Italian to the effect, “Oh, good God ! please to take papa away from the house, and make him never come back again.” Beatrice remained where she was standing, hidden by the window curtains. A feeling of something akin to horror came over her. Poor little, innocent Lotta, what must not her childlike heart have suffered to induce her to utter such a prayer ? “Oh ! it is really dreadful,” murmured Beatrice.

Fortunately, the Marchese shortened his visit, and departed just as Beatrice was contemplating asking the Princess Basileff to let her come and stay with her for a few days, on the plea that she wished to see

more of Marie, who was constantly bemoaning the loss of her sister.

The Marchese having gone, both the Marchesa and herself breathed more freely.

The last days had come and gone, and on the morrow Madame Arlini, Beatrice, the children and servants, were to start for England. In London they would separate, Madame Arlini to go down to Farleigh Abbey, and Beatrice to start with her sister and Hubert on their expedition to Sweden and Norway.

"I cannot say I expect much pleasure from our trip, the weather is too cold yet to travel about in those parts. I believe Hubert wants to go because the doctor has said sea air will do Conty more good than anything, and she is a very good sailor,

too, and never minds how rough the sea is."

"When shall I see you again, I wonder?" asked the Marchesa, stroking the head leaning against her. "I do not think I can do without you for very long."

"Promise, Isabella, that if you are ill or in any great trouble, worse than it always is, if that is possible, you will send for me at once? If you only knew how dearly I love you, and what a joy it will ever be to me to be a comfort to you! I shall never forget to the last day I live how good and true a friend you have been to me."

"Dear child, I have not been good. I have only pleased myself. Since you have been with me I have been happier than I have been for years."

The journey to London was well accomplished, but was with a heavy heart, and a painful foreboding which she could not shake off, that Beatrice parted from her friend on the day following.





CHAPTER VII.

HE yachting expedition proved much more agreeable than Beatrice had expected. The weather was exceptionally fine for the time of year. They saw a great deal,—made many excursions from the different places they stayed at. Colonel Leslie, who owned the yacht, was a very pleasant host, full of fun ; both sisters lost their hearts to him. Hubert had known him for years, he was, in fact, a distant cousin of his, and

had always liked him. Had he been asked to find a fault in his friend, he might have declared that he knew of none, unless it was a slight tendency to flirt with every pretty woman who came in his way, but even then it was difficult to quarrel with him, for his manners were so full of courtesy, and he never allowed himself to be carried beyond the limits of good taste.

At moments a feeling of jealousy would arise in Hubert's heart when he saw how much his wife enjoyed the genuine admiration with which Colonel Leslie seemed to regard her.

But Beatrice had observed to him one day when, with her quick perception, she had seen something of what was passing in his mind,—

“Conty loves admiration, and it is a matter of perfect indifference to her who bestows it on her. She has had it given to her all her life, and would scarcely know how to exist without it. After all, Hubert, there is something to be said for that sort of nature, because people like that never fall in love—it is all a question of mere amusement with them.”

Hubert, however, showed no disposition to find fault with Constance; and the result was, she continued as genial and affectionate with him as before, so that he began to believe in real earnest that he had at last gained her love; which in truth he had done—at least, the full measure of love that it was in Constance Denzil’s power to bestow on anyone.

By mutual consent the party landed at Scarborough. Colonel Leslie was engaged to pay some visits in the neighbourhood, and Beatrice had entreated Hubert to spend a couple of days there, as Farleigh Abbey, where Madame Arlini was then staying, was only eight miles distant.

She had been uneasy at not having received any letters from the Marchesa for nearly three weeks ; and she looked forward with great delight to the thought of taking her friend by surprise, and had therefore not written to announce her visit.

Constance declared that several letters must have gone astray, as some she was expecting had never come to hand. Hu-

bert was at a loss to account for it, as he had given most careful directions as to the forwarding of letters.

The day after their arrival at Scarborough, Beatrice started very early on her expedition to Farleigh Abbey. It was the third week in May, the Spring had been an unusually early one, and the day was quite summery in its warmth. The country was new to her, so that she did not feel her solitary drive wearisome. She was struck by the stately-looking mansion which she approached by an avenue, through a park with splendid old timber. A chapel adjoined the house on one side. Everything looked still and peaceful, and not a human being was in sight. She knew that the family must be at home,

for the blinds were drawn up and the windows wide open.

The bell was answered by a young footman, dressed in a mourning livery, an Englishman, and a total stranger to Beatrice. She asked for the Marchesa. The man hesitated, and seemed doubtful as to whether his mistress would receive any friends. But Beatrice settled the matter by desiring the fly driver to go round to the stables ; and hearing that Madame Arlini had gone out into the gardens, which were of considerable extent, she inquired which way she had taken. The man pointed to a small iron gate at the end of the terrace, leading towards the woods beyond.

Beatrice at once started in pursuit of

her friend. She found herself following a winding path through a wood. The sun was almost too hot, and having walked rather fast, she sat down on the mossy stump of a tree to rest. She heard the cawing of the rooks, the singing of the birds, the hum of the insects in the air, which was fragrant with the smell of the primroses and wild hyacinths. She was struck with the beauty of the woods, in which every tint of green was shining forth.

It was a glorious day; all Nature seemed to be rejoicing. Long afterwards Beatrice remembered with a painful distinctness every impression made on her that morning; for a long time the scent of a primrose or the sight of a blue-bell were intolerable to her.

Having rested, she resumed her way. It was just the sort of walk Isabella Arlini would have chosen on such a morning, loving Nature as passionately as she did. She strained her ears to catch a sound of the children's voices, for they would surely be with their mother.

Suddenly she came on a splendid group of Scotch firs, their red bark glowing brilliantly in the sunshine. She involuntarily stopped to admire them, and longed to be able to sketch their grand outlines. Just beyond, through the trees, she caught sight of a blue glimmer, which looked like water. The path she was following became steeper, and a few steps were cut in it here and there. The wood had been cleared away somewhat on each side. A turn in the path

revealed to her a lake, with a boat-house standing just below. Water-lilies were growing close to the banks, which were overhung in some places by drooping birch trees.

As her eye took in all these details, with an intense sense of their beauty, she stopped short as if transfixed ; for a little beyond the boat-house, and close to the water's edge, stood a woman in a long black dress. In one moment she had recognised Isabella Arlini. Her hat had fallen to the ground, and one tress of hair had escaped and fell down her back.

Suddenly she fell on her knees, and, burying her face in her hands, her figure rocked from one side to the other, as if enduring some fearful agony. Then,

dropping her hands, she raised her face upwards and uttered a cry—a cry of such intense anguish and despair, that Beatrice felt it would haunt her to her dying day. She threw her arms wildly up, as if imploring help, and cried, in Italian,—

“ Oh, God forgive me ! Oh, Father, have mercy on my soul ! Take me to Thyself, for I can no longer live ! ”

A moment after, she had risen, and was walking to the water’s edge. Beatrice hesitated no longer. The necessity for action braced her, and the paralysed feeling which had chained her to the spot on which she stood, vanished. In another minute she had flown down the remaining steps, and in desperate haste flung herself against her friend, and throwing

her arms round her knees, held her fast; then rising to her feet, and still holding the Marchesa in a tight grasp, she dragged her by main force from the water, never releasing her hold till they had reached the group of fir trees, and there, almost throwing her down on to the grass, she knelt beside her and burst into tears.

Madame Arlini seemed half stupefied, and watched the poor girl's falling tears with a strange apathy. She expressed no surprise at seeing Beatrice, nor did she ask her any questions. The girl took her hand between her own, and kissed it.

“ Isabella, darling,” she said, at last, “ do tell me you were mad—that you were not yourself when you were about to throw yourself into the water; and take away the

life that is not yours to do as you will with. It was a terrible sin you were nearly guilty of!"

"No," replied Isabella Arlini, quite calmly; "I was not mad; it was the only thing left for me to do—it was my only chance of being at rest. Beatrice, why did you stop me? I should now have been lying so peacefully among the water-lilies—all would have been over—no more misery—rest for ever! God would have forgiven me."

A shiver seemed to pass over her, hot as the day was. She was looking frightfully ill. Large dark circles were round her eyes, which looked worn, as if she had shed many tears.

"But, my poor darling," said Beatrice,

"you must know you were going to commit a deadly sin. Your life belongs to God."

She smiled a ghastly smile, but answered nothing.

"Isabella," again urged Beatrice, trying to arouse her friend, "when you were about to do what I tell you is a deadly sin, whether you believe it or not, if you cared nothing for your own soul, had you no thought for your dear little children who would have been motherless?"

At these words a great change passed over the Marchesa's face, and she burst into a fit of passionate weeping, which seemed completely to overpower her. When at last she could speak, she said, in a broken voice,—

"I have no children."

She spoke with such difficulty that it was only by degrees Beatrice could draw from her the sad story of the last two weeks. Her husband, she said, had been but little with her since she had come down to Yorkshire, and his conduct towards her then was such that her only comfort lay in his absence. Rather more than a fortnight ago he had returned. Little Nina had been ailing the day before, but the day after he had arrived he desired she should be ready to go for a drive with him in his stanhope. When told Nina was not well, he went up to the nursery and found her playing with some toys. He said there was nothing really amiss with her, and the air would do her good.

The Marchesa had remonstrated, and he had declared she set his children against him, and he would not submit to it any longer. The child appealed to her mother. Her head ached, and she implored her not to make her go. The nurse was furious, as the sun on that day was very hot, and the wind very cold. And, as the Marchesa added, this freak of taking the child out was simply to gratify his cousin, who was staying in the neighbourhood, and had expressed a wish to see the child.

He brought little Nina home two hours later. She was so giddy and faint that they had to put her to bed directly, and the doctor was sent for. At first he was doubtful as to what was the nature of the child's illness ; on the day after, he declared

it was suppressed scarlet fever. The Marchese, on hearing the illness was of an infectious character, at once left the house. What the few following days were, the Marchesa said she could not describe. Nina died three days after her symptoms showed the nature of the malady ; before the week was quite finished, her little sister had followed her. Yesterday both children had been buried, and their father had not even returned to be present. He sent word to say he was too ill to travel, and, added poor Madame Arlini,—

“ Nothing he could do would wring one tear from me. I know you have saved me from what is a great sin, Beatrice, but I cannot be grateful.”

Very slowly Beatrice led her friend back

to the house. To leave her she felt was out of the question, so she decided on sending a note to Constance by the fly which had brought her from Scarborough, explaining briefly what had passed, and how impossible it would be for her to leave Isabella. She begged her luggage should be sent over early the next day. She would write and let them know her movements, as soon as she could persuade her poor friend to come to some decision. "Of course, my going near you or Hubert for the present is out of the question, for though I am not afraid of infection, being in this house at all is a risk ;" this she had added to set Hubert's mind at rest as to his wife being exposed to any danger.

The Marchese wrote several times to his

wife, offering to go with her to Paris, or anywhere she preferred, but she declined his offer, and said she should at present be happier alone. Whether a sting of remorse had penetrated into his hardened soul, he alone knew.

At last the Marchesa decided on returning to Paris ; to stay in Yorkshire was to her impossible, though the grief of leaving the grave where her children were buried was the greatest agony to her. London was too full for her. She had become almost a complete invalid.

Once more, after so short an interval, Beatrice found herself again in the place she had quitted so lately, and how unutterably sad was the daily sight of her suffering friend.

A few days after their arrival, the Marchesa had broken a blood-vessel in the lungs, and for a time her life hung on a thread. She herself seemed so calm and happy at the thought of her life ebbing away shortly, that the girl felt it was almost heartless to wish that it should be prolonged, and Beatrice could no longer disguise it from herself that Isabella Arlini was dying rapidly.

“Beatrice,” said the latter to her one day, when she had been feeling more ill than usual, “remember that, after my children, I have loved you best on earth. Do not cry, my child; I want you to promise not to grieve for me when I am gone; you love me too well to wish to keep me from my darlings. I am thankful

now my little ones were taken from me ; I should have died soon under any circumstances, and then death would have been terrible to me if I had had to leave them behind. God has been good to me. And now, my dear child, I must talk to you of yourself. I have, as you know, a large fortune of my own, and it is in my power to dispose of as I will. I have left you what comes to two thousand pounds a-year in English money ; the rest, which is considerable, I leave to my brother. I have given you the larger portion of my jewels, and all my lace ; you are to look over all my things with my good Victoire, for whom I have well provided, and you are to select anything you like, and she will take the rest."

"Oh ! Isabella, please do not talk of it, indeed, I cannot bear it," cried Beatrice, striving vainly to control her emotion.
"How good you are to me, but you know, my very dear one, I am not ungrateful."

"I do not wish to hear a word about gratitude ; I am pleasing myself. I have chosen out of my jewels that opal and diamond necklace your sister likes so much ; tell her to wear it for my sake. And now, my little one, you will never be dependent on others ; and may God give you happiness in His own good time. Now I will be silent while you read me those verses I like so much."

After Beatrice had read several hymns which Isabella was specially fond of, she found she had fallen asleep, and she sat

by her side fully an hour thinking sadly of the void in her life when this true-hearted, loving woman should have gone. She thought over the years of sorrow that had been her lot, the unrequited affection, the coolness and indifference, the brutal insults.

“ Oh ! she is a noble woman,” exclaimed the girl ; “ the gates of heaven will indeed open wide for her admittance.”





CHAPTER VIII.

Twas the month of May, and a party of travellers were seated in the *table d'hôte* room of the principal hotel in Amalfi. The windows were all thrown open, and the cool air from the sea blew in softly, but still the room was oppressively hot, at least such seemed the opinion of a young Englishman sitting at the head of the table, as he kept up a volley of complaints, addressed in very audible tones to the lady sitting on his left. He

expatiated on the delights of being cooked alive in this hole, as he designated that most lovely spot on the Mediterranean. He complained of the vileness of the food ; the wines he described as one more detestable than another, and he certainly experimented on a good many different sorts, a regiment of bottles having accumulated in front of him ; finally he declared life not worth living under such circumstances. He glared at most of the company then present, as much as to say that they contributed their share to the annoyances from which he was suffering, and aggravated him accordingly.

The lady to whom he was imparting his sentiments was an elderly woman, probably his mother, though there was no similarity

between their features, she having evidently in her youth been a very good-looking woman. Her son, on the other hand, was decidedly plain, his features heavy, the brow low, and the lower part of the face coarse-looking. The only thing to be commended in his appearance was his figure. He appeared to be fully six feet high, he had broad shoulders, and a remarkably active, well-knit frame.

His mother answered some of his remarks briefly, and in a very low voice, as if anxious he should cease the discussion of his grievances, and at last she made no further attempt at any reply and devoted her attention to her dinner, and when not thus engaged, to a leisurely survey of her neigh-

bours. None seemed to attract her particularly, but on a young lady who was her *vis-à-vis*, sitting on the other side of her son, her glance lingered somewhat longer, returning again at intervals.

Lady Lawrence, for such was her name, was an intelligent, clear-sighted woman, and it did not take her much time or thought to settle in her own mind what manner of person was her opposite neighbour. Evidently the young lady was not in her first youth, but as art had done its best to conceal the ravages of time, it was not easy to guess her exact age. She was tall and slight, with a good figure, fair hair, a good deal crimped and cut into a fringe across her forehead, a thing especially obnoxious to Lady Lawrence. She appeared bright

and lively, and had entered into conversation with Sir Giles Lawrence.

“She is no fool,” thought Lady Lawrence, “but is very second-rate, and has never, I feel convinced, been in good society ; the sort of person to be decidedly avoided.”

Seated on the other side of the young lady in question was an older lady, with a gentle, amiable face, wearing rather a smart cap. Lady Lawrence decided she was the mother.

Miss Hughes, for it was none other, the woman who held the happiness of Allan Barrington and Beatrice Annesley in her hands, was staying at Amalfi with her aunt, Mrs Davidson. They had landed at Brindisi, and were seeing something of Italy before

going on to England. Dr Davidson was returning with his regiment, and would rejoin them later.

Miss Hughes was perfectly aware of the scrutiny bestowed on her. She had the advantage of Lady Lawrence in one respect, for she was perfectly well aware who the new comers were. She had watched the arrival of Sir Giles and his mother that day, and through her aunt's maid had discovered their names, with the additional information, volunteered by their courier, that they were very rich and important people in their own country. Bessie Hughes had at once decided that somehow she must establish some acquaintance with them. The mother she instinctively felt would be a difficulty, but then that rather

increased the pleasure she anticipated in carrying out her resolution.

Mrs Davidson, who was one of the kindest-hearted and most sociable of women, addressed a few observations from time to time to Lady Lawrence, who replied quite civilly, but made no attempt at keeping up the conversation, so after a few more remarks, Mrs Davidson desisted from any further attempts at sociability. Miss Hughes had spoken rather shyly to Sir Giles, who at first stared at her as if somewhat taken aback, but after he had recovered himself he answered readily enough, and kept his eyes on her as if he expected she should continue the conversation. Her manner was timid and diffident, as if she was half afraid of him, but when they rose

to leave the room, she dropped her handkerchief which he stooped to pick up for her, and she was rather effusive in her thanks, and nodded brightly to him on leaving the room.

Some days passed, and the acquaintance with Lady Lawrence had not progressed, but Bessie was not easily discouraged ; besides, she often met Sir Giles, when he was alone, and she always managed to stop and have a little conversation with him. She had met him on one or two occasions when he was strolling moodily along the beach, and had even walked some distance with him, after having first ascertained that they were out of sight of the hotel.

Mrs Davidson had frequently besought

her niece to leave off talking to Sir Giles, and not to show her willingness to be friends with him so plainly ; his mother had been anything but civil in her manner to them, and was, as Mrs Davidson expressed it, giving herself great airs. Bessie only shrugged her shoulders, and laughed.

A few days later on, she observed,—

“ What a glorious morning, aunt ; it is really too fine to stay indoors. I shall get my hat and go out and sit on the beach. I daresay I shall find a shady spot.”

“ Unless you do so, Bessie, you will run a very good chance of getting a sun-stroke.”

Bessie had been standing under the awning on the balcony of their sitting-room, where she could command a good view

of all that went on below. The sun was almost scorching in its intensity ; a faint haze lay over the valley behind the town ; the sky was cloudless ; the sea a deep ultramarine blue, except here and there where the water was shallow, and then it changed into a pale green. White sails shone in the distance ; on the shore below, the fishermen, more or less scantily attired, were lazily engaged in spreading out their nets to dry. Swarms of children were shouting just below the garden of the hotel, or running about among the corn spread over the streets to dry. Bessie did not enlighten her aunt as to her reasons for going for a stroll on this overpoweringly hot morning. About a quarter-of-an-hour previously she had observed Sir Giles

standing in front of the hotel talking to his courier ; she had drawn back so as to escape observation, had watched him light his cigar and stroll off towards the beach, and a sudden resolve to do likewise occurred to her. Lady Lawrence she had heard was ill and confined to her bed, so she feared no interference on her part. Ten minutes later she was walking slowly in the direction taken by Sir Giles. She wore a white dress and a Leghorn hat trimmed with poppies and corn flowers, and carried a large white parasol in her hand. Sir Giles watched her as she advanced to where he was lying at full length under the shade of a large rock.

“She is a fine woman, by Jove !” he ejaculated, “and has a stunning figure. I

can't see what my lady means by saying she has no style. I like the colour of her hair too, not that dull, heavy brown, like Lettice's, with no light and shade in it. She isn't half bad-looking, and has something to say for herself too."

Bessie here raised her eyes from the book she held in her hand, and gave a little start of surprise.

"What! have you come out also, Sir Giles? I suppose because you felt what I did, that it was a sin to remain indoors on such a lovely day?"

"Well, partly, and also because I was bored. One's own company is better sometimes than that of other people. My mother has been unwell the last few days, and was in bed all yesterday; to-day she

is on the sofa, but not in an angelic frame of mind."

"Dear me, Sir Giles, I cannot say your remarks sound very dutiful, but I am not quite the right person to lecture you, as I believe I was feeling something of the same sort when I came out. Some people must always be forcing their opinions on others; now I say, live and let live, we cannot expect everybody to have the same tastes and feelings, or to find their pleasures in the same things; people are so intolerant; but I must not interrupt you by breaking into your solitude, or you will be abusing me next."

"Oh! no, don't you be afraid, Miss Hughes. I am not quite such a bear after all. Supposing now you come and

sit in this shady place ; you can lean against this rock, so you will be quite comfortable."

"I do not quite know whether I ought to stay, Sir Giles. I am not talking of what I should like to do. I do not feel sure that my aunt would approve of my sitting here with you all alone, for she is rather old-fashioned in her ideas ; and of one thing, I am quite sure, and that is, your mother would not approve of it, for she does not like me," and she laughed, disclosing a row of white teeth of which she was very proud.

"Well let them disapprove, that is their look out, ours is to do what we like, and I very particularly like to sit

here and talk to you ; and if you like it also, I see no reason why we should not please ourselves. But what makes you think my mother does not like you ? ”

“ I feel it,” she answered, smiling ; “ I know it by the very way she looks at me, when you are kind enough to talk to me. I am very quick at guessing what people think.”

“ Ah ! a wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse, you know.”

“ But, Sir Giles, that is not a good simile ; I am not blind.”

“ Of course you are not ; indeed, you have a very sharp pair of eyes. I hope you do not think me rude.”

“ What a donkey he is,” thought Bessie.

“Have you been long away from England?” she asked, being quite determined to glean all the information she could while she had so favourable an opportunity.

“It seems years to me,” replied Sir Giles; “we came away last October, and we have been moving about from place to place ever since. I hate it; I never wished to go abroad at all, but my lady insisted on it; said I must see Switzerland and Italy, and I believe she proposes going through Germany on our way home; and when once she gets an idea into her head, there is no holding her. I'll be hanged if she gets me across the water again. I lost all my shooting last autumn, and my hunting this winter.”

“Well, you have at any rate the satis-

faction of feeling that you have been a dutiful son, and that is something," she added, giving him a bright smile. "And really I do not wonder at your mother liking to have you with her, for you are her only son, are you not?"

"Yes, and more's the pity; perhaps, if she had other sons and daughters, she would not make such a point of my being always with her, which, as she has my cousin a great deal with her, strikes me as being very unreasonable."

"Have you a cousin who lives with you?" asked Bessie quickly. "Is she nice?"

"Yes, my cousin Lettice Lawrence. My mother is devoted to her; swears there is nothing like her."

"Swears!" cried Bessie, laughing merrily;

"that is the last word you ought to apply to your mother. I do not believe she could swear if she tried."

"Don't jump down a fellow's throat like that, Miss Hughes; you know what I mean."

"Well, what is this cousin of yours like? You do not speak somehow as if you shared your mother's devotion to her."

"You are quite right there; Lettice is not a bad sort of girl, but she is not the style I admire; she has dark hair, a stumpy figure, and we don't like any of the same things. She is awfully churchy, which just suits my mother."

"Oh, dear! what a description. I can quite understand, as Lady Lawrence is so fond of your cousin, her not liking me, for I am the opposite to her in everything."

I wonder that she does not want you to marry your cousin," said Bessie, in a careless manner.

"That is just what she does want."

"And are you engaged to her?" continued Bessie, with a mocking laugh.

"I suppose we are engaged, in a sort of way, but 'there's many a slip between the cup and the lip,' you know."

"I cannot say you speak very enthusiastically of your cousin, who is to be your future wife; and yet I should say—" and she hesitated.

"You should say what?" he asked, looking up into her face as he leant on his elbow, close to where she was sitting.

"Perhaps I had better not say it; well, I mean I fancy that you might be the sort of

man— No, I will not go on,” she added, in a tone of confusion.

“ *I will* hear what you were thinking— do tell me.”

“ I think,” said Bessie, playing with her parasol, and speaking in a timid way, “ that you might be the sort of person who might care very desperately for a girl if you loved her.”

“ I have not a doubt I should, but I defy any man to get up a great passion for Lettice ; she is such a reserved, frigid sort of girl, and as cool as a cucumber.”

“ Oh, Sir Giles ! how funny you are. She must be quite a vegetable then both by name and by nature.”

“ I do not see anything funny in what I said. Should you like a man who was like

a log or a stone, and never seemed to feel anything."

"I? well I rather think not; but my experience has been quite the other way," she replied, turning away her head and sighing deeply.

"How?" he asked; "do tell me; you are not engaged to be married, I hope?"

"I do not think that is a question you ought to ask me; besides, what can it matter to you, seeing you hardly know me, and cannot care a straw as to my future life. How odd it is that we should be talking in this way! A week ago we had never even seen each other, and now I am speaking to you in a way I should never dream of doing to anybody else. I suppose there must be some sort of sympathy be-

tween us—an affinity they call it. I am naturally very reserved. There must be something peculiar about you," and she raised her eyes to his and fixed them on him earnestly.

"You have not answered my question yet."

"If you will have an answer, though mind I dispute your right to insist on having one, I will tell you that I am engaged to be married. I hate saying it, and I hate still more knowing it is the truth." A sad expression had clouded her face.

"She is a pretty girl," thought the young man, "and what a fresh complexion she has."

Lady Lawrence might doubtless have enlightened him somewhat on that point, but Sir Giles was far too ignorant to detect

the carefully put on touches of rouge, and the delicately applied eau de Camelia.

“Why do you look so sorry for yourself?” he asked; “are you not happy? Why do you marry the fellow if you do not like him?”

“It is a long story;” she turned and gazed steadfastly at the blue sea. “I hate thinking of it, and wonder why I should be speaking of it; why I should be spoiling a pleasant morning by thinking of what makes me miserable; it is not so often that I enjoy myself as I am doing now, so it is foolish to let unpleasant thoughts creep into one’s mind.”

“Tell me all about it,” he entreated, with as near an approach to softness in his voice and manner as he was capable of.

“I never had a brother,” said Bessie, “but what a difference it would have made to me. Now, one something like you would have been a great comfort to me. I cannot help regretting that you are not my brother,” and she smiled brightly at him.

“I do not wish I was your brother, all the same, Miss Hughes, sisters are so uninteresting. I want to know who the lucky devil is you are going to marry ? ”

“I will not tell you his name ; it is a long story, and began when I was quite a child, years and years ago.”

“Well, you are not so very old now.”

“Much older than you think, Sir Giles. I am certain I am a good deal older than you.”

“Not you—I am thirty.”

Having ascertained his exact age, Bessie knew how many years it would be desirable to deduct from her own.

"Well I was not far wrong," she replied, "for I am twenty-nine."

"You do not look like it," said Sir Giles admiringly.

"I do not agree with you, Sir Giles. Why, it is only this morning my aunt was telling me how completely I have lost my good looks lately."

"Never having known you before, of course I cannot judge, but I do not think you have anything to complain of; and now about your marriage."

"I knew a man," said Bessie, speaking as if with some effort, "when I was a child almost; we were the same age, and saw a

great deal of each other; it ended in his making me promise to marry him. We were hardly more than boy and girl then. When my father heard of it he was furious. I was his only child you know, and, poor dear, I am afraid he thought too much of me, and he wished me to make a better marriage. I do not think I was really in love with my friend, but one day I most foolishly pledged myself to marry him whenever I could. A year ago, after all these years—think, Sir Giles—he came to me, having heard my father was dead, and that I was therefore now a free agent, and reminded me of my promise, given so long ago, of marrying him. He showed me my own letters, in which I had given him that assurance. I do not mind confessing to you

that I was dreadfully upset, for I had found out long before that I had never really cared for him, and in all these intervening years he had passed completely out of my mind. I told him frankly what I felt, and I begged him to release me from my promise. He was very wretched, and told me how, during all those long years, he had clung to the idea of my becoming his wife some day. I was wrong, I know, and every day I realise it more and more, but I hate giving pain, and am stupidly soft-hearted." Here her face flushed deeply. Even Bessie Hughes could scarcely utter such lies with an unmoved countenance. "So I ended in promising to marry him, and every day I regret it more and more."

"He was a mean hound!" cried Sir Giles

indignantly. “ I should like to horsewhip the selfish brute ; sacrificing a girl’s whole life in that sort of way.”

A cold shiver, hot as the day was, crept over Bessie, as she heard his words. What if he could only guess the truth ! But no, it was quite impossible, she would not allow herself to fear.

“ So, after all, you see,” she continued, with an attempt at a smile, “ we have something in common to sympathise about ; we are both going to be married against our will.”

“ By George ! I don’t know that. I am not married yet, thank Heaven ! I have run so long in single harness, that I shall consider pretty well before I make up my mind to go in double.”

“ Well, I have no right to offer you advice, seeing we are almost strangers, but my own troubles make me take an interest in you. Pray do not throw away your life as I am going to do. You are young, and many a woman would be proud to be your wife. I do not wish to flatter you, but your position alone need not tempt any woman. You are so capable of making a woman care for you yourself alone. Think what it is to be tied and bound to an uncongenial companion for life ; it is long-lived bondage, even though the wife may be what is called a nice woman, even a good woman. What you want is a companion, someone who is capable of taking an interest in your pursuits, one who cares to hear about your horses, your shooting, your farming—sup-

posing such should be subjects of interest to you. A wife, in short, should study her husband's tastes, adapt herself to be his companion, in fact, sink her own identity in a great measure in his. If he cares for music, she should cultivate the kind he cares for most."

"Exactly," interrupted Sir Giles; "now my cousin Lettice cares to play nothing but Beethoven or Mozart, and if I ask her for a lively tune, such as a waltz or a march, or something jolly, she says it is a pity I do not hire a fellow with a barrel-organ to grind outside the windows. Then she never knows one horse from another, never will take a turn round the stables, hates everything she considers horsy conversation. If I tell her of a good run we had with the

hounds she sits dumb, or asks if any people got hurt, or whether much mischief was done to the crops. All I believe she cares for is bustling in and out of cottages, meddling with the clergyman, who, I daresay, as often as not wishes her down at the bottom of a well ; getting a lot of poor people up at the house, giving them clothes, seasoned, you may be bound, with heaps of good advice, so that if one goes near her to get her to do anything one may want, she says she is too much engaged, and the whole place smells of nothing but flannel and old women."

"Poor Sir Giles, I really do pity you," replied Bessie, almost tenderly, as soon as she ceased laughing at his energetic protest against his cousin and her mode

of life. "I may say I sympathise with you, because I have nearly as little in common with the man I am destined to marry. But I must be going, or my aunt will believe I am lost. One would really think sometimes that she forgets I am not in my teens, she makes such a fuss about me."

"Oh, do stay a little longer. It is so jolly out here."

"No, no; I will not be tempted. I daresay I shall get a scolding as it is, when she hears I have had you for a companion.

"Why should you tell her?" he asked.

"Perhaps it might be as well to say nothing about it," answered Bessie doubt-

fully ; “ but I always dislike any concealment.”

“ Well, people should not make themselves disagreeable then by fault finding. Let us keep our meeting to ourselves. Perhaps my lady mother might take it into her head to come and chaperon us next time,” he answered, with a loud laugh. “ I wish you would come out on the sea this afternoon, Miss Hughes.”

“ Good gracious ! what an idea, though there is nothing I should like better.”

“ Well, come for a walk. You might take compassion on a poor fellow in a place like this.”

“ We will see,” replied Bessie, resolving that she would be chary of her society, so as to enhance its value. “ *Au revoir,* Sir Giles ; pleasant reflections to you.”



CHAPTER IX.

BESSIE had no intention of keeping her interview that morning with Sir Giles a secret from her aunt, and she lost no time in giving her an account of this meeting.

Mrs Davidson looked grave, and at last said,—

“I will tell you what I think, Bessie, and that is, you had better take care what you are about. Lady Lawrence is a stiff, stuck-up sort of woman, and thinks a great deal of herself and her son; and I consider her manners to us on every occa-

sion we have met her, if not actually rude, very stand-off. She will be anything but gratified at an intimacy between you and her son ; and under these circumstances, I call it a great want of dignity and proper pride on your part to be going out of your way to make friends with him. My belief is that she considers us quite beneath her."

"If I had the smallest desire for Lady Lawrence's approbation or good opinion, I might be disposed to agree with you," returned her niece, tossing her hat on to a table ; "but seeing that I do not care two straws whether she likes me or not, I shall allow no consideration for her opinion to prevent my making a companion of her son whenever it may please me to do so."

"I cannot see what attraction you find

in Sir Giles," replied Mrs Davidson. "He has a fine figure certainly; beyond that I do not see what one can say in his favour. He is plain, and has no manners to speak of, and very little to say for himself."

" You may add to your description, aunt, if you please, that he is decidedly bearish, and that the word which most accurately describes him is lout. But he has one advantage in my eyes, and no small one, he is rich and unmarried. Morris tells me they have a very fine place in Northamptonshire, and are rolling in money, and he is the only son. Taking into consideration these facts, I am decidedly of opinion that he is worth cultivating, and nothing would surprise me less than that I should end in marrying him, that is to say, if I choose to do so."

" Bessie," cried Mrs Davidson, raising

herself from the sofa, that she might better contemplate her niece, “are you mad?”

“I never felt saner in my life,” replied Miss Hughes coolly. “They say most people are apt to be a little insane on some subject or other. I do not know how that may be; but at this moment I feel in full possession of my senses.”

“You must be joking, then. Have you forgotten that you are engaged to be married?”

“Forgotten it! certainly not. It is never absent from my mind; that fact alone would induce me to marry Sir Giles, if nothing else would. Do you think that there is anything in the world that would give me such satisfaction as to be able to write to Allan Barrington, telling him I had found a husband more to my

taste than himself—one his superior in birth and fortune;—to be able to show him that, if he despises me, others do not? As he would have cast me off, so have I cast him away. I would give five years of my life," and Bessie Hughes's eyes glittered with a hard, cruel light, "to humble him. Do you think I love him? No, a thousand times. I positively loathe him. A man who has dared to tell me to my face he has ceased to love me, and that after all his wild protestations of love in years gone by;—a man who tells me he only marries me from pity. When he wrote the other day, and told me he had met a girl, and was desperately in love with her, and implored me to release him from his promise—not to stand between him and his happiness—do you think I could not have crushed him under

my feet? I hate him. No words can express one half of what I feel for him."

She stopped speaking suddenly, her eyes seemed starting from her head, and her face was flushed a deep crimson.

Mrs Davidson literally stared at her niece. She seemed overpowered at the storm of words, and it was some little while before she could find courage to speak, so shaken and shocked did she feel.

"He wrote to you, Bessie! What do you mean? You do not know what you are saying."

"I know only too well. My memory is not likely to fail me. I never forget an injury, and I never rest till I have paid it back." A vindictive smile settled on her mouth. "Yes, he wrote four months ago, or rather more. I never told

you, for I knew what your advice would be. You would have told me I ought to give him up. You were always soft about Allan ; but I did not choose to do so. He had made me suffer, and unless it is for my own convenience, he shall pay the penalty. He is bound to me, and in honour bound to marry me."

" How could you ? how could you ?" groaned Mrs Davidson ; " it is really horrible of you, and so unwomanly. I really assure you I call it almost revolting to think and speak as you do. Bessie," she added, looking at her niece, with a puzzled and partly pitiful look, " there are times when you are quite beyond my comprehension."

" I daresay I am," returned her niece calmly, " and, therefore, I think it would be better to drop the subject."

"I do not believe you have an atom of heart," replied Mrs Davidson passionately ; "and to think you are my own sister's child, and can behave in such a way. I tell you it is positively repulsive. Poor fellow ! how I pity him ; my heart aches for him."

"In which case, as you sympathise so deeply with him, you had better do all you can to assist me in my determination to become Lady Lawrence," replied Miss Hughes, with a contemptuous laugh.

"I help you ! I will not stir a finger in the matter ; you disgust me too utterly.

"Then, in that case, all that I ask you is to leave me to manage my own affairs," remarked Miss Hughes as she left the room.

For several days afterwards Lady Lawrence continued far from well. Some days she was even confined to her bedroom ; and

Sir Giles and Bessie made several excursions. Since her conversation with her niece, Mrs Davidson never interfered in the smallest degree with any arrangements Bessie chose to make. Her sympathies were so completely aroused on Allan Barrington's behalf, that she would have welcomed anything which would enable him to recover his freedom, and, as far as she could see, the only thing likely to favour that would be her niece's marriage with Sir Giles, though how Bessie proposed to bring him to the point and conquer his mother's objections, Mrs Davidson was at a loss to guess.

One evening at the *table d'hôte* dinner, Sir Giles proposed that Mrs Davidson and her niece should join him on the day following in an expedition to Ravello, and he began in a blundering and confused

manner to explain the objects of interest to be seen there, but Miss Hughes came to his assistance, and succeeded in expressing his half-developed ideas about Saracenic architecture in a few intelligible words. “What a head that girl has,” he thought; “knows everything, can always help a fellow at a pinch, and never makes one feel a fool, as Lettice always does.”

Mrs Davidson, however, was not agreeable to the proposal, and expressed her dislike to riding a mule, in spite of the hints her niece gave her of her own wish to accept Sir Giles’s offer. Heartily as Mrs Davidson desired that her niece should marry the young baronet, and release her favourite Allan Barrington from his cruel position, she could not bring herself to assist in the matter. She felt the whole scheme was so thoroughly degrading.

It ended in Bessie's joining Sir Giles on the following day, and walking a great part of the way to Ravello with him. The time of their departure from Amalfi was drawing near, and she felt the necessity of bringing Sir Giles to a decision. She therefore devoted herself assiduously to his amusement both morning and afternoon, taking care, however, never to join him till they were well out of sight of the hotel, or to be seen returning in his company, for she feared any gossip reaching Lady Lawrence's ears.

It was the last day of their stay at Amalfi ; they proposed spending two days at Sorrento, on their way to Naples, where they intended remaining a week.

“ This is our last walk, Sir Giles,” observed Bessie, as they were walking in some olive gardens behind the town. “ I wonder

whether we shall ever meet again. At any-rate, we have spent a very pleasant ten days together; at least it has seemed so to me, and it will be always a pleasant memory to me."

"It will be your own fault," replied Sir Giles, puffing away at his pipe, "if we do not meet again."

"I do not see that," she answered, gravely. "Our paths in life lie very far apart, though we are both going to England; but that is a large place. We are each going to fulfil our different duties, and what is worst of all, I do not think we are either of us contemplating that fact with any degree of pleasure. I can answer for myself. Let us sit down here, it is too hot to walk; in fact, I wonder why I came out at all, for it is cooler indoors, unless—" She stopped suddenly.

“Unless what ?” he asked.

“I have changed my mind as to what I was going to say. Second thoughts are sometimes best.”

“I hoped you were going to say you came out because you cared to walk with me.”

“There is no use trying to find a reason for all the foolish things we do, Sir Giles.”

“You are very unkind, Miss Hughes.”

“People generally are when they speak the truth.”

“What is the matter with you to-day ?” he asked, as he removed his pipe from his mouth, and gazed at her fixedly. “Has anything put you out ?”

“Nothing particularly. I am not cross, but I feel very depressed. Life just now seems to me more sad than usual; for one thing, it is made up of saying good-

bye, though, fortunately for me, I seldom meet anybody for whom I care enough to be sorry to wish them good-bye."

"Present company excepted?" he asked, with what he intended for a tender smile.

"Yes," she said, smiling at him rather sadly. "I am sorry to say I must make an exception in your favour."

"That is a nice thing to tell me. I cannot see why you should be sorry."

"Don't you?" she answered, bitterly. "So much the better then."

"You are speaking in riddles, and there is no use in trying that game on me. I am a stupid sort of fellow, and only understand things said in a plain way. Tell me why you are sorry to say good-bye to me."

"I cannot exactly explain it to you. I hardly know why myself. I suppose it is

because I meet so few people whose society I care for. Perhaps that is my own fault, but my acquaintance with you seems to have been a bright spot in my life, and now it has ended, for we shall most probably never meet again."

"Never is a long day."

How dull he was, thought Bessie. What terribly hard work it was to get an idea into his head. He was indeed a heavy fish to land, and required plenty of line, too, if she intended to succeed in her undertaking. As the words rose to her mind, there came a vision of the old days long gone by in which she used to watch Allan Barrington fishing, and landing the gaily-speckled trout. He had loved her in those days. The remembrance nerved her and gave her courage to go on with the task she had set herself. No trouble was

too great, no effort of patience beyond her, could she only have it in her power to cast him off with the scorn his conduct towards her merited. She set her teeth hard, and resolved, cost what it might, she would be patient.

Her reflections were interrupted by her companion's asking her suddenly,—

“Why do you marry that fellow?”

“Because I must. I have already told you I cannot bear making people unhappy, and unless I put an end to the possibility of marrying him by taking another husband, he will never give me up.” Bessie paused, though she was wholly indifferent as to the score being made against her by her recording angel, but as he did not answer, she continued,—“A woman must marry. I ought to have made up my mind to do it sooner, but as long as my

dear father lived, I was so happy, I could not bear the thought ; now I am alone, I feel there is no help for it—absolutely none," she said, in a tone of great dejection. " My aunt is very kind, but, somehow, not a very congenial companion. She likes living in towns, loves society—I mean balls and parties—while I prefer the country. I love riding ; a horse is to me far more attractive than half the people one has to talk to, and I am never so happy as when I go out for a walk with any number of dogs. I suppose it is the result of my early training. The man I am going to marry is in the army ; I may perhaps have to go out to India, or goodness knows where. His family is a very good one ; I do not believe he is very well off at present, but he is the heir of his uncle, who is a baronet. When I think over

my life, and remember how little there is in it attractive to me, and that I cannot love the man I am to marry, can you wonder that I feel almost broken-hearted at times? And that is why my friendship with you has done me harm. You are so different; at times I almost, perhaps not quite, wish I had never seen you.” She raised her handkerchief to her eyes, but as suddenly withdrew it. “No, I will not cry. All men hate tears, so I will not victimise you on our last day. Let us talk of something else. Tell me your plans, for you know what an interest I take in them. How soon do you think you will be married? Will your cousin be as delighted as she ought to be at seeing you again, or will she be, as you so naïvely expressed it the other day, in a vegetable frame of mind?”

He remained silent, sending forth volumes of smoke.

“Are you not going to answer my question. When are you going to be married? I should like to think of you whenever it may be, and from the bottom of my heart wish you good luck.”

A deep flush rose to his brow, and then he answered, in a harsh voice,—

“Never! if it is Lettice Lawrence who is to be my wife; the very thought of marrying her is hateful to me. I never loved her, I never even cared for her as much as I do for my old dog, and since I have known you, I hate the thought of her.”

“Sir Giles, what do you mean?” asked Bessie, in a tone of horror; “what have I done? I cannot have prejudiced you against your cousin. Why, I have never even seen

her ; please do not say such dreadful things ; you quite frighten me.”

“ You have made me feel how unfit she is to be my wife ; you have made me feel how much rather I would marry you.”

“ But that you know is quite impossible,” replied Bessie, as calmly as the beating of her heart would permit her. “ It is not kind of you to joke upon such a subject.”

“ Why is it impossible ? ” he asked, angrily. “ I have never yet found anything impossible on which I have set my heart. Perhaps you don’t care for me.”

“ My feelings have nothing to do with the matter, Sir Giles, so please do not humiliate me by making me confess what I should find it very painful to do. You are engaged to marry your cousin, which you have told me is your mother’s earnest desire ; in that case, do you suppose she

would give her consent to your marrying another girl ? ”

“ And do you suppose that I am a baby, and that my mother is to dictate to me whom I shall marry, and whom I shall not ? She has had her own way a precious deal too long, and it is high time she should know that I am my own master. Why will you not marry me ; you cannot pretend that you care for that sneak of a fellow ? ”

“ No,” cried Bessie heartily ; “ I hate him, and more than ever since I have known you.”

“ Well, what is there to prevent your marrying me, unless you hate me too ? ”

“ That is cruel,” said Bessie, with a sob ; “ what have I done or said to give you that impression.

“ Well then, answer a plain question. Will you marry me ? ”

"No, I cannot," replied Bessie, in a broken voice, remembering from her observation of Sir Giles's character that nothing strengthened his determination to do any given thing so much as opposition. "Your mother would never consent, she would hate me for being the innocent cause of your crossing her wishes, and she would end by making you hate me too; at any-rate, she would probably turn away your love from me, and then I should be utterly miserable."

"Let her try," laughed Sir Giles contemptuously. "You cannot deny you love me?"

Bessie turned away her head.

"Is it so very hard to say?" he asked, bending over her till she felt his breath stirring her hair, "or are you after all only a flirt?"

“ Why do you say such unjust things ? ” replied Bessie indignantly. “ I do not believe you care for me, or you would have a better opinion of me.”

“ Don’t I love you, Bessie ? ” and he suddenly threw his arm round her, and held her tightly. “ Now answer me ; I shall not let you go till you have given me a proper answer—Yes or No, will you marry me ? Do you love me ? ”

“ I dare not say it,” she answered ; “ but you ought to know.”

“ Then you will be my wife ? ” he replied, with a triumphant light in his eyes.

“ Do take care, Sir Giles, somebody might come this way.”

“ I’ll be hanged if I care ; they are quite welcome.”

Bessie released herself from his arms, and reseated herself.

" You must not think me ungrateful," she began, " nor doubt that I love you dearly, but I tell you honestly I shall never have the courage to face your mother, it would only end in something dreadful, and that means being separated from you. I feel as sure of it as I am sitting here." She had put her arm through his and leaned her head against his shoulder. " How hard it is to give you up, my darling," and she sobbed gently, " I cannot tell you, and you will never, I know, find anybody who will love you better ; anyone who will care more to be your companion, and devote themselves to your happiness ; but it is better it should end now than later. It would kill me then."

" Don't be a silly, Bessie ; my mother, if she moved heaven and earth could not prevent my marrying you."

“Yes, it sounds very true, but all the same I have a presentiment. There is only one way in which I would consent to marrying you; but there are difficulties in the way of it. Your mother, after all, is not the only person who would object to our marriage. My aunt has set her heart on my marrying the man I have been so long engaged to; she is devoted to him, and she would put difficulties in the way of my marrying you.”

“Well, what is your way you spoke of?”

“I was thinking,” replied Bessie diffidently, “how much easier it would be if we could only marry some day soon, before we go back to England, without letting anyone know of it till it was all over.”

“By Jove! that is a splendid idea, and would save a lot of fuss and bother. How

would it be if we got married at Naples ? I could get it all settled."

" Oh, no ! that is so dreadfully soon."

" Do you think so ? " he asked, as he kissed her ; " I do not."

She pleaded somewhat feebly for a delay ; but the more she opposed him the more determined he became, and at last she consented that he should make all the arrangements to enable them to become man and wife that day week at Naples. Fortunately, as he observed his mother had decided on returning thither in two days' time.

" She thinks now she is better," he observed, with a laugh, " that it is high time to take her beloved son away from the danger of your society, and she has not an idea that you are leaving to-morrow. She little knows how remarkably convenient

her motherly forethought is to the subject of it, for nothing could suit our plans better."

Bessie, before parting with her lover, impressed upon him strongly the necessity of caution. She decided that she and her aunt should take up their abode at Naples in a different hotel from that in which Lady Lawrence and her son intended staying.

It was with a beating heart and a high colour that Bessie sought her own room, and then sat down to reflect over her success. The man was a boor, she thought, dull and ignorant; but she felt confident of being able to manage him. He had a small mind and a good deal of vanity, but she would play her cards in such a way as not to let her wishes cross his. In marrying him, she honestly intended to do her duty by him, and this she repeated

to herself more than once, as a salve to her conscience. Her ambition was gratified at having secured for a husband a man with a title and a large fortune ; and last, but not least, came the reflection that she now had it in her power to be the one to cast away from her the man to whom she was engaged previously ; to show him that she held him to the full as cheaply as he held her.

For the present she decided on saying nothing to her aunt, for it was impossible to know what she might be capable of doing with her conscientious scruples.





CHAPTER X.

GHE days passed, and Madame Arlini still lingered. At times she seemed a little better, and a faint hope rose in Beatrice's heart that her friend might yet be spared to her a little longer. She had written frequently to the Marchese, by his wife's desire, and his letters in answer were full of solicitude for his wife's health, begging that he might be kept informed constantly as to her state.

One day Madame Arlini told Beatrice that she herself had written to him, ask-

ing him to come over to Paris without delay, as she felt her life was drawing to a close.

“I want to see him again,” said the Marchesa, “that I may satisfy my mind whether I have as really and truly forgiven him as I have striven and prayed to do. I cannot forget, in spite of all I have suffered, that I once loved him—that he is the father of my lost darlings. Arlini might have been a different man under other circumstances. His early training was very much against him, and his infatuation for his cousin, Giulia Morini, has embittered his whole life; for her influence over him has been unbounded. I wish to part in peace with my husband, and assure him myself of my forgiveness. When I am gone, Carlo perhaps will suffer as much or even more from remorse than I have

done from his conduct during all these weary years; for what is so bitter as an unavailing remorse?"

"Isabella," replied the girl, who was kneeling beside her, "I verily believe you are more of an angel than a woman."

"No, child—not that. I have been at times wickedly impatient, doubting, and mistrustful of God's love and mercy. I see all things now so much more clearly. It was needful that my heart should be softened and chastened, and I suppose much pain and sorrow were necessary for me before that could be done. I am thankful that I do believe—thankful that I shall soon be released from my suffering, and for ever after know nothing but joy and peace. And, darling, may the blessing of Heaven rest on you always for having saved me when I was nearly mad from misery!"

Victoire, the Marchesa's old and faithful maid, here entered with a telegram.

"It is for Mademoiselle," she said.

"No bad news, my child?" asked the Marchesa anxiously.

"No, Isabella; it is from Conty, to say she and Hubert arrive at Meurice's to-night. I wonder what brings them over so suddenly?"

As soon as she had uttered the last words she regretted them. She feared her friend might attribute her sister's arrival to the fact that at any moment she might be taken and Beatrice be left alone.

"They have been very good in letting me have you all this time; but it will not be long now before you will be with them to brighten their home again," said the Marchesa quietly.

"Good!" cried the girl. "Why, they

are only too thankful that I can be of any comfort to you. They both love you, and feel for you so much. I always tell Conty she ought to have been jealous of you, for Hubert is so devoted to you. I daresay Conty has fixed her heart upon a good round of shopping, and Hubert never objects to anything in reason that gives her pleasure."

That day Madame Arlini seemed stronger than she had been for some time. Her sofa had been drawn close to the window, that she might enjoy the warm summer air. Beatrice proposed going out to procure some fresh flowers; it was her delight to surround the invalid with a profusion of them.

"My reading has one very good effect on you, Isabella — it has a soothing influence; and just now you look as if

you could sleep. I shall not be away long."

After having summoned Victoire to sit in the adjoining room, she started on her errand.

An hour later she returned, laden with flowers, when Pietro informed her that a gentleman was awaiting her in the large salon.

"What is his name?" asked Beatrice, wondering who her visitor could be.

"Pardon, mademoiselle," replied the old man; "but those English names are too much for my memory, and I cannot remember it; but monsieur a l'air très comme il faut."

She hastily deposited her basket of flowers in the vestibule and entered the room. To her utmost surprise, she saw standing before her Allan Barrington.

“Oh ! Allan,” she cried, as soon as she could recover from her first astonishment ; “why have you come here ?” but the words of reproach were belied by the expression of joy shining from her large dark eyes.

“Is that all you have to say to me, after all these weary months ?” he replied, and in one moment he had clasped her in his arms and was showering kisses on her head and lips. “My little love,” he murmured, straining her to his heart, “how I have wearied for a sight of you, and now that I have you at last in my arms, I can find no words to tell you all I feel. Look at me, darling, and let me hear again that you love me.”

“How can I speak,” asked Beatrice ; “when you are doing your best to crush

all the breath out of me ? But, Allan," she continued, as she released herself somewhat from his arms, " you ought not to forget that you must not speak as you are doing ; have I not told you that all is over between us ? Indeed, you must let me go."

" I must ! All is over between us ! I rather think not, unless you have ceased to love me. Look at me so," he added, raising her head so that her eyes met his ; " tell me again you love me, not once only, but a dozen times," and he took the words from her lips as he kissed her passionately.

" You know I do," replied Beatrice ; " but why make me repeat again what it is a sin for me to say ? "

" Is it a sin ?" he asked, laughing. " Are you sure of that, my little, soft, loving darling ? Suppose I prove to you the contrary, what will be my reward ? "

"Are you mad, Allan? you are so changed, I cannot make you out."

"I feel as if I had been drinking, but I have not, in the ordinary meaning of the world. If I am drunk, it is with joy. Read that," he continued, putting a letter into her hands, and bending over her as she did as he desired her.

The letter was dated about five days previously. It ran thus:—

"When you receive this letter you will know that I am the wife of Sir Giles Lawrence of Hardean Park, in Northamptonshire. I do not pretend to feel the smallest regret that the link which has bound us to each other is severed; in fact, I look upon it as an escape from a life-long misfortune. Anything more contemptible than your conduct has been with

regard to me, words fail me to describe. Feeling about you as I do, you will perhaps wonder why I held you to your engagement to marry me. I will explain it in a few words. You had humbled me, and wounded me in the tenderest points. I therefore resolved you should pay the penalty to the full for having done so. By preventing your marrying your last love (and for her sake I trust she may continue to be the last), ‘I made your life a misery to you.’ I quote your very words in the letter you did me the honour of writing to me, insisting on being freed from your engagement to me. For that reason solely I held you to your word. I might have made you a good wife, had you not shown openly your indifference, nay more, your disgust, at my claiming your promise of marrying me. From

that hour I have hated and despised you. You owe your release now to no consideration I feel for you, but solely to the fact that I have chosen to marry a man your superior in birth, fortune, and position. In doing this I acted only for my own advantage; you may rest assured that your happiness had not the slightest weight in my decision. I will not go through the mockery of wishing you joy in your new prospects, for your future happiness, or the contrary, is a matter of complete indifference to me. You cannot be more heartily thankful that all is at an end between us than I am.

ELIZABETH LAWRENCE.

“NAPLES.”

“What a vile letter,” cried Beatrice; “to think that any woman could be capable of expressing herself in such a detestable way to a man whom she had once loved.”

“Is it vile?” asked Allan, laughing; “to me it is a most welcome letter, I might almost say a delightful letter. I feel neither hurt nor surprised, in fact there is room in my heart but for one thought—it gives my darling to me. Whoever this Sir Giles Lawrence may be, he has earned my eternal gratitude.”

“I can hardly believe it yet, Allan, it is so sudden, and the transition from sorrow to joy is almost overpowering; it is almost horrible to feel on one hand so intensely happy and on the other equally miserable.”

“To think I should have been such a brute,” replied her lover, with an air of contrition, “as to have never yet asked after that poor dear woman. I can hardly hope there is a chance of her being better.”

“Allan, she is dying, and if you only

knew how infinitely touching everything about her is."

"My uncle told me all about the last sad time when she was in England. I could find it in my heart to curse the man who has wrecked her life as he has done."

"If one thing could make her feel happier than another, Allan, it would be the knowledge that I have got my heart's desire. You cannot think what a true, loving friend she has been to me ;" and the tears welled into her eyes.

"My uncle is in Paris with me, darling," as he kissed away the tears from her eyes tenderly. "He is so anxious to see her once more ; he has felt for her so much. Do you think she will be able to see him ?"

"I am sure she will wish to do so, and to-day is one of her good days, if one might venture to call it so. If you come at four

o'clock, I think it would be the best time, for she will wish to see you, too, I know. But now I must be going to her ; I never leave her for long at a time. She has the first claim on me, even now," she added, looking into his face with a look of perfect contentment and joy, "you must not mind."

" You little witch, don't you know that I mind horribly ; but I am not quite a brute either, so one more kiss, and tell me again you love me."

" How many more times do you expect me to tell you the same thing ?" replied the girl, looking in his face saucily. " It is for the last time, mind, and you know so well the truth that I love you with my whole heart."

" I will tell my uncle what you say, and you may expect us at four."

“ Give him my very best love, and tell him I long to see his face again. And now good-bye for the present.”

On returning to Madame Arlini’s room, she found her awake, and anxiously watching for her to return.

“ What lovely flowers you have brought me, child. But what has happened to you ?” continued the Marchesa. “ There is a light in your eyes and a brightness in your face I have often looked for in vain.”

Beatrice knelt by her friend’s side, and taking her hand in both of hers, kissed it gently, and then, in a few words, told the story of her new-found happiness.

“ Oh, child ! I think I am almost as happy as you are ; my last wish has been gratified. Thank God, I have lived to see it accomplished.”

Beatrice had been right in her antici-

pation that Madame Arlini would wish to see both Sir John and Allan Barrington, and as the hour approached for them to arrive, she grew restless and somewhat excited.

At four o'clock, hearing they were in the salon, Beatrice went to receive them. Sir John came forward, and holding out both his hands, stooped to impress a warm kiss of greeting.

“ My little niece at last, you have well earned the happiness I trust is in store for you by your courage, your self-denial, and your determination to do your duty. As for Allan, he has been in such an extraordinary state of mind ever since he received that marvellous letter yesterday, that at moments I have been in doubt as to whether he is wholly sane. Truly, Miss Hughes, or rather Lady Lawrence,

must be a remarkable specimen of your sex."

He made many inquiries as to the invalid, and was touched as Beatrice described to him her anxiety to see him once more.

"You had better come at once, I think," said the girl, leading him to the Marchesa's room; and then, after having placed a chair for him close to the sofa on which she was lying, she returned to Allan.

For nearly an hour Sir John remained with his dying friend. The time passed quickly to Beatrice, as she sat with her lover; and when he rejoined them again, he looked as if years had been added to his age. The tears stood in his eyes, and he spoke with some difficulty.

"I have seen many sad sights in my life," he said at last, "and have often been

a witness of very great sorrow, but I never saw anything so touching as that dear woman dying in the other room. What a noble nature ! and what a tender, sympathetic creature she is ! I shall go now ; I would rather be alone," he continued, in a husky voice. " One cannot shake off the sadness left on one by such an interview as I have just had, in a few minutes. I shall see you again, little one, soon. God bless you."

Beatrice would not let her lover remain long with the Marchesa, as she saw her strength was well nigh exhausted.

" It is a wrench to say good-bye, but I am thankful, before I go, my dear little Bee will be happy. I need not ask you to love her and shield her as much as lies in your power from all evil, Captain Barrington, for I know well how precious she is to you.

You are, indeed, blessed in having won such a treasure as her love."

She held out her wasted, fragile hand to the young man, who, bending forward, pressed it reverently to his lips. He could not utter one word, for his heart was full to overflowing, and his eyes were wet with tears, and nodding to Beatrice, he left the room hastily.

The rest of that day was spent by Beatrice in reading to her sometimes a hymn she loved, or some passage in a book she especially cared for, and when they parted at night, the Marchesa said,—

"I have only Carlo now to say good-bye to. I wonder whether he will come in time for me to do so. But should he not, I have written him a letter, and told him how fully I forgive him."

It was very late that night before Beat-

rice could get to sleep. The great and unexpected happiness which had befallen her was almost overpowering in its intensity, but ever to her mind the thought of her dying friend returned. Oh ! how much she owed her, thought the girl. How she had helped her to bear her sorrow, to strive to be patient.

“ As long as I live,” she cried aloud, “ I shall bless her memory. And to think that ere long she will have left me for ever ; that she will be entering on that solitary journey through Death’s valley.”

She burst into a fit of weeping, till, wearied and exhausted, she fell asleep.

She was awakened early the next morning, and found Victoire standing by her bedside, her face pale, and eyes swollen and red. The girl felt her heart stand still, and gasped,—

“Victoire ! what is it ? Is the Marchesa worse ?”

“Mademoiselle, chère enfant,” and the poor woman, throwing herself beside the bed, and burying her face, sobbed, “I know not how to tell you ; my sainted mistress is gone ; she has rejoined those darling children. Oh ! it is not for her I weep, but I cannot bear the thought that I shall never hear her voice again.”

Beatrice felt stunned ; she could scarcely realise the truth at first ; not a tear came to her relief. She sat up in her bed staring mutely at her companion.

“Are you sure ?” she asked at last, “She may only have fainted. Let me go to her—it cannot be true.”

“Pauvre enfant, listen to what I tell you ; it is only too true, mon Dieu.”

She then recounted what had passed,

though she was interrupted constantly by her falling tears.

During the greater part of the night, the Marchesa had slept quietly, and when Victoire lay down at a late hour on the sofa she occupied close to her mistress's bed, she was still sleeping, and her breathing seemed quite natural. About three o'clock she had heard a slight movement and a few words half whispered. In one moment she was on her feet, and bent over her dearly-loved mistress. For a few seconds the Marchesa lay quite quiet, and then she held up her hands, and opened her eyes and said, in a low voice, "I am coming, my darlings." After that she never spoke again.

"And after a few minutes—it might have been a quarter of an hour," said the woman—"she ceased to breathe. I raised

her in my arms," cried Victoire; "I laid my hand on her heart; it was still; and then I knew she had gone—passed away like an angel in her sleep. I could not leave her; I only knelt by her side and watched her; I knew it was useless, but I could do nothing else."

"Oh! Isabella, my darling," cried the girl wildly; "why did you not call me, Victoire? To think she went away, and I was not with her;" and then the flood-gate of her tears opened, and she cried bitterly.

"Mademoiselle, pauvre ange," murmured Victoire, as she pillow'd the girl's head on her shoulder, "I did not forget you, but I dared not leave her. You must not give way, or you will make yourself ill; and remember how she told us both so often we were not to grieve for her,

for she longed to be gone, to be once more with her children. All that is left to us now is to faithfully obey her, though it is hard—ah ! how hard."

"You will let me go to her !" cried the girl imploringly.

"You shall go when you are dressed ; not just now," replied Victoire, turning her head away.

Before leaving her room, she was forced by the kind-hearted woman to drink a cup of coffee, and then she went down to see the last of one she had loved so well.

All had been changed ; the furniture had been moved back, and lighted candles were burning in the room. On her bed lay Isabella Arlini, looking, if possible, more lovely than in her lifetime. The sad expression, so habitual to her face,

was no longer there. The dark eyelashes lay like a heavy fringe on the marble cheek, an almost childlike smile seemed to hover about the mouth, and the beautiful hair lay on each side of her in long tresses.

“Is she not beautiful?” whispered Victoire; “it is the face of an angel.”

A bitter cry broke from the girl, and she threw herself beside the bed, her whole frame convulsed with sobs. She tried to pray—to be calm. Victoire endeavoured to take her away, but she would not be moved.

“Oh! leave me here, I cannot go away from her,” she cried, in a broken-hearted voice.

For a full hour she stayed watching all that remained to her of her best-loved friend; and it was only when a servant

called Victoire and told her that Lord and Lady Denzil were waiting to see Mademoiselle, that she consented to leave the room.

She met with the most heartfelt sympathy from both Hubert and Constance; the latter was crying bitterly.

“If I could only have seen her once more, Bee.”

“Dear little sister,” said Hubert, “you must come home with us to the hotel to-day.”

“Oh no! please, Hubert, don’t ask me to; I cannot leave her yet.”

“Dear child, I fear there is no help for it. Pietro told me just now that there had been a telegram from the Marchese to say he should arrive this evening. You cannot stay in this house while he is here, alone.”

And so they took her home. On the day following, Victoire came to see her as she had promised, having packed up herself all Mademoiselle's wardrobe. She told her that on the Marchese's arrival in Paris, Pietro had met him at the station, and told him the sad news. On reaching the house he had gone straight up to his wife's room.

"And," continued Victoire, "after staying there for nearly an hour, he came out, and I assure you, Mademoiselle, his face was something awful to look at. He looked like a man who was half dead himself."

"Ah!" replied Beatrice, "I remember she said, 'It will be worse for him when he remembers all, after I am gone, than it has been for me to bear it.'"

Nothing could exceed the kindness shown by every one to the poor girl. They wanted to take her away at once

from Paris, but she urged that she should be allowed to remain till after the funeral, and that she might pay one visit to her friend's grave.

Sir John talked to her long and seriously ; he told her that to abandon herself to her sorrow would be wrong, after the earnest request made by Madame Arlini that she would refrain from so doing ; also, he said, that nobody could keep feeling that the gain to the poor sufferer was so inestimable that to sorrow for her departure was almost selfish.

“ Ah ! but, Sir John,” Beatrice replied, “ I cannot help asking myself—why was her life allowed to be so miserable ? It does seem so hard. I do not feel sorry and miserable as you think only because she is gone ; it is the sorrow of her whole life—to feel she is gone without ever

having known any happiness here below—that makes me wretched.”

“Then, my dear child, you should try and remember that where she is gone all her sorrow shall be turned into joy; surely her happiness there will be greater in proportion to what she has suffered here; let that thought comfort you.”

Allan Barrington did his utmost to be a help and comfort to the girl he loved, and she clung to him in her grief, though the great happiness that had come to her was chastened by the sorrow which had followed it.

A short time later saw the Denzils and Beatrice, accompanied by Sir John and Allan, on their way to Denzilmere; and about six weeks later Beatrice and Allan were married, Colonel Annesley quite agreed to the marriage taking place at

her sister's house, and Mrs Annesley was only too thankful to be spared the fuss and worry of a second wedding. She was not well enough to come down so far from London, which was a matter of no regret to any of the party. Allan Barrington had decided on leaving the army, and had taken a small place about six miles from Denzilmere. The Marchesa's liberal provision for Beatrice had greatly facilitated all these arrangements.

The first Christmas Hubert had insisted on their all passing at Denzilmere, Constance being fully recovered from presenting her husband with a son and heir, whom both father and mother believed to be the most extraordinary baby. Sophie and her husband came over, and the whole party were loud in their praises of Constantine, who had most fully justified the

confidence Sophie had placed in him by becoming his wife.

Marie Basileff had been already spending some time with Beatrice. The Lawleighs had arrived in England only a few days previously, and had gladly accepted an invitation to join the party.

“And now,” cried Marie, “Sophie and Mr Lawleigh can resume their attractive discussions on every conceivable subject, and quarrel to their hearts’ content.”

Lady Clementina, they all agreed, looked prettier than ever, and kept them all in a constant state of admiration over her wonderful toilettes. Sir John, who had consented to spend the greater part of the year with the Barringtons, was in great force, and as genial as ever. To him Beatrice confided one day that at times she almost dreaded lest some sorrow should

befall her, so intense was her happiness ; that she could not help feeling that she had been blest with more than her share of this world's joy.

“ Well, my dear child, you have seen, young as you are, something of life's phases, and, please God, whatever may be in store for you, strength to endure all will be given to you.”

THE END.



